The Curse of Tramp Life.

A-No 1

"THE FAMOUS TRAMP"

WHO TRAVELED 500,000 MILES FOR ONLY $7.61.


Yours truly
A. E. Nolk
The Rambler

THE CURSE OF TRAMP LIFE

—BY—

A-No. 1

THE FAMOUS TRAMP

A TRUE STORY OF ACTUAL TRAMP LIFE
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

ILLUSTRATED BY THE FAMOUS ARTIST
JOSEPH EARL SHROCK.

SEVENTH EDITION

PRICE, 25 CENTS.

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PREFACE.

IN presenting this, my third tramp-story to the public, I do so with the assurance that this book is absolutely suited to be read by the most delicate child as well as the most dainty lady, as not a single objectionable word nor phrase is written therein. It is certain to be of abounding interest to any person, young or old, as it gives the public an actual insight into the true life of the tramp, tearing to shreds the glamor thrown over his miserable existence by romancing writers.

Primarily, its object is to prove to boys and men of restless dispositions, that by their heeding the "Lure of the Wanderlust," they not only wreck their own futures, but very often the lives and happiness of their parents, and sometimes those of their families as well.

Secondarily: It shows to intending "runaways" what terrible punishment they must expect, should they be caught beating their way upon railroad trains.

Thirdly: It calls the attention of the humanely inclined public to the class of penal-institutions scattered from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which under the names of convict-quarries, convict-farms, convict-turpentine works, convict-lumber mills, etc., etc., only too often duplicate the terrible conditions I herein describe as existing in a "convict-chain-gang," in which murderers and runaway youths, hardened criminals and first offenders, are chained together and are treated in such a revoltingly inhumane manner, that instead of reforming them, by far a large majority are turned loose upon society, to wreak their vengeance for these absolutely unnecessary and senseless brutalities, which have been condemned and discontinued by all modern penal institutions.

I hope that this 1912 volume will meet with as good a reception as my book of 1910: "Life and Adventures of A No. 1," and my book of 1911: "Hobo-Camp-Fire-Tales," and can assure the readers that I shall endeavor to earn their good will and approval with all future productions of my pen.

THE AUTHOR.

ANNUALLY

350,000

BOYS RUN AWAY FROM HOME.

35,000

BECOME CONFIRMED TRAMPS.

7,000

ARE CRIPPLED BY ACCIDENTS.

3,500

ARE KILLED BY THE CARS
OR
THROUGH EXPOSURE.

TO THE READER.

AFTER reading this very interesting book, please remember that fully 150,000 of the 200,000 tramps, who aimlessly roam the country to-day were young boys, who ran away from their homes.

Will you not please do your share to assist humanity at large, and the Railroad Companies especially, to solve the tramp problem, by explaining to every boy you find at your door asking for a lunch, what a fool he is, trying to lead all his days, the life I am picturing in this book, from my personal experiences as a tramp?

Can you not take the time and patience, and do by him the same as you would pray some other person to do by your own son, brother or relative, should he run away from his home, leaving behind him a broken hearted mother to mourn, while waiting perchance for the return of that very same wandering, wayward boy, who had knocked at your door?

THE AUTHOR.

To Every Young Man and Boy

Who Reads this Book, the Author, who Has Led for Over a Quarter of a Century the Pitiful and Dangerous Life of a Tramp, gives this Well-meant Advice:

DO NOT

Jump on Moving Trains or Street Cars, even if only to ride to the next street crossing, because this might arouse the "Wanderlust," besides endangering needlessly your life and limbs.

Wandering, once it becomes a habit, is almost incurable, so NEVER RUN AWAY, but STAY AT HOME, as a roving lad usually ends in becoming a confirmed tramp.

There is a dark side to a tramp's life:—for every mile stolen on trains, there is one escape from a horrible death; for each mile of beautiful scenery and food in plenty, there are many weary miles of hard walking with no food or even water—through mountain gorges and over parched deserts; for each warm summer night, there are ten bitter-cold, long winter nights; for every kindness, there are a score of unfriendly acts.

A tramp is constantly hounded by the minions of the law; is shunned by all humanity, and never knows the meaning of home and friends.

To tell the truth, it is a pitiful existence all the way through, and what is the end?

It is an even ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that the end will be a miserable one—an accident, an alms-house, but surely an unmarked pauper's grave.

CHAPTER I.

"Where is My Wandering Boy To-Night."

"BRAXTON MANOR," the palatial, stately home of one of Kentucky's proudest families, built like a castle upon the apex of a gently sloping hill, in the midst of a well kept park of giant oaks, loomed like a specter into the moonless, balmy summer night, while stretching away to the valleys below and the hills beyond where broad, fertile acres, that gave up bountiful harvests to add annually a golden tribute to the wealth of the Braxtons. Off to one side, some distance from the manor are the "Negro quarters," that section set apart on every large southern estate, for the humble homes of the colored house servants and farm laborers. The most pretentious one of these was the home of the manor's expert cook, "Old Aunt Dinah," as "her folks up the hill" affectionately called the trusty old-timer who was considered part and parcel of the Braxton family.

She had just entered the log cabin and had deposited upon the rickety table a large wicker basket filled with all the left-overs from the manor's supper table, which was hers by right of a long established "before the war" custom. After cautioning her pickaninnies—some her own and others adopted—to "hush up and behave," she turned to her husband and said, "Joe, pore Missus Braxton shore had another one of her crying spells to-day. My pore Missus! How sorrow is eating out her pore heart evah since her boy ran away." Then she wiped a tear away that had strayed down her ebony cheek and continued, "Just to think, that evah since that boy squalled the first time, I was his 'Mammy.' Watched him grow up to be a fine boy, and now, Oh! Lawd, bring him back to my Missus up the hill,

as she shore will grieve herself to death if he does not come home purty soon." This she followed with an audible sigh, and then she opened her wicker basket and handed each pickaninny, ranging in all colors and sizes, a generous "snack," that constituted their daily supper.

Later on the neighboring darkies, the one-time slaves of the "quality folks up the hill," as they characteristically called their former masters, came visiting "Old Aunt Dinah," their society leader, and soon the clear, care-free notes of a violin, the happy songs of the darkies, their laughter and their shouts of pleasure filled the air, while the red dashes of flame sputtering from the oak log burning even on this warm July night, in the cabin fire-place, furnishing both light and heat, gave a touch of color to this scene of absolute contentment.

This revel kept up until far into the night, then the darkies wended their ways home to their own firesides, and soon complete silence and darkness reigned supreme.

But look! There upon the hill amongst the majestic oaks, in the upper story in the left wing of the Manor, a lighted lamp was moved from room to room. It was held by the hands of the lady of the manor, Mrs. Braxton, clad in her night gown, who now entered the spacious library where she held the brightly burning lamp high before the large picture of a handsome, manly boy of about seventeen, and with her handkerchief she carefully brushed away every particle of dust that might have adhered to the painting and then gazed long and longingly at that beautiful, life-size portrait of her own, only child, her runaway son, Buford.

Tears were streaming down her pallid cheeks and wearily she set the lamp upon the heavy oaken library table, and sank into a chair and placing her head between her hands she wept bitterly. All alone with her sorrow, the mistress

of a grand manor, and of wealth, and yet—only a broken-hearted mother mourning for her runaway boy.

What thoughts must have passed through her mind! For years the Braxtons had been childless, then came a welcome little stranger to turn the cold, lordly manor into a happy home. They named the boy after a beautiful little town in Georgia, Buford, as there, passengers upon the same train, the Braxtons had first met and had promptly fallen head over heels, victims to Cupid. She remembered each happy hour with the cooing baby, the complete happiness of its proud parents and their relatives; the devotion of the negro servants, who would have had themselves torn into shreds to protect his tiny body against harm and how they called him "Marse Buford" even while he was still in the daintily carved cradle, dressed in swaddling clothes. Oh, how happy were those days! Then he grew up, the only child of doting parents, went to school and then—here she sobbed out aloud—came that night which she cannot efface from her memory, when he slipped into her bedroom all dressed up in walking clothes, put his arm around her neck and kissed her with such a strange fervor as she had never known him to pet her before, and while she was arousing herself to ask him what his queer actions meant, he was gone and she heard him close the door of his own bedroom and thought that the divine love of a child for its mother had caused him to show his affection to her at such an unearthly hour of the night.

Then broke the dawn of the fateful day. She seemed to awake unusually early, impelled by a strange restlessness, and arose to hear the first notes of the birds as they warbled songs of happiness to their little ones in their nests scattered under the eaves of the manor and everywhere throughout the park.

Then the breakfast bell rang, and she and Mr. Harold

Braxton repaired to the dining room and seated themselves to the well-laden table, wondering why Buford, never late, and always ready to bid them a friendly morning's greeting, had not put in an appearance.

Jim, the old-time negro waiter, was dispatched to the boy's room to inquire the reason why he had failed to join his parents at the breakfast table. Jim knocked and then cautiously opened the unlocked door, and with only one glance at the untouched bedclothes, bolted down the stairway, and ashen-gray, trembling like a leaf, he blurted out: "Marse Braxton, Marse Buford has not gone at all to bed last night and is not in his room." She remembered how she had to hold onto the table to keep from sinking to the floor, and how she felt her heart jump up into her throat as she thought of that last embrace of him, whom she loved best in all the world.

A hasty search of his room was made and everything only proved too plainly that he had run away, as he had dressed himself in his best Sunday clothes, carefully folding his discarded garments, and had only taken such things as a boy going out upon a camping trip into the woods and hills would need.

The darkies were sent through the neighborhood and a thorough search of all the camping grounds and shady nooks for miles around was made. The relatives and authorities were notified by dispatches to be on a lookout for him; but all this was in vain. Only one faint clue was found. An old negro woman passing the Manor, coming home from a late sick visit, saw a rough-faced, heavily built man standing in the darkness of the trees near the main entrance-gate, and to whom, darky fashion, she bid a "good evenin', Massa," receiving only a rough grunt as an answer to her humble greeting.

She remembered that awful first night, when she was

Sobbing as if her heart was breaking, Mrs. Braxton arose at all hours of the night to gaze at the picture of **her runaway boy.**

yet strange to the fearful waiting that, since that day has extended over, oh, such a long stretch of solid sorrow! The first day passed, then the next one and as she gave up hopes to see him soon again, she prayed through all the long weary hours of the dreary, restless nights for just a line, just a single word from her wandering boy. But none came, although Mr. Braxton had assured her that runaway boys never write nor send a word to their homes until they are so far away that even a quickly sent telegram will not cause their being held by the authorities.

Weeks passed on weeks, and she failed in health, from a happy woman she became an aged, haggard and broken-hearted wreck of her former self. That longing for her boy became her one overpowering passion, and she induced Mr. Braxton to offer a reward of five hundred dollars for information or apprehension of her boy, and an equal sum for the capture of the scoundrel who had enticed him from home.

Gradually the picture upon the library wall, the only true likeness of her Buford, became her shrine. She did not feel so lonely when gazing at that mute portrait, and many times, sobbing as if her poor heart would break, she would rise, at all hours of the night to gaze at the picture of her runaway boy.

She was as proud of that boy as only a mother could be. And, too, had not his preacher, his teachers, his class-mates and play-mates praised him many times to her for his manly qualities? He was a favorite with everybody he came into contact with, and now that he was gone, his mother, more than ever realized her loss.

On another part of the library's wall hung a large calendar. She arose heavily out of the chair to count the months, the weeks and the days since his disappearance,

when suddenly with a loud thud, she fell heavily in a dead faint upon the floor.

Mr. Braxton, awakened by the noise, rose from his bed and seeing through the wide open door of the library the brightly burning lamp, investigated and found the limp form of his wife stretched out upon the hard floor. He tenderly lifted her upon the lounge and while tears of anguish were streaming down his face, he pitifully sobbed: "Poor, poor Helen! Oh! if only Buford could be home at this moment and see what he has done to his poor mother, he would never have run away, or at least would have written her a single word to allay her fears!" Then he dashed some cold water into her face and as she gradually revived, he made her as comfortable as possible.

When Mrs. Braxton gained full consciousness, she pointed her trembling hand at the calendar, and between sobs, muttered: "Look, Harold, to-night, just one year ago, Buford gave me his last kiss, his sole reward, for the long seventeen years I slaved for him to make of him what he was the day he left! Oh, Harold, I only wished that some other mother would do for my Buford the same as I did for that little runaway boy who knocked a month ago, asking for a lunch, at our door. Oh! Harold, if only some other mother would feel for me as I did for that lad's mother. I gave him all his starved insides would hold and then commenced to tell him what a fool he was, trying to leave his home to become a restless, good-for-nothing, homeless tramp, shunned and despised by all humanity and constantly hounded by those who represent the law. I spoke to him about his home, as I inwardly wished that someone would talk to our own boy, and described to him the sorrows of his own good mother and kept on in that vein until he finally commenced to cry and turned so homesick, that he gave me his true address and I notified his mother, who promptly

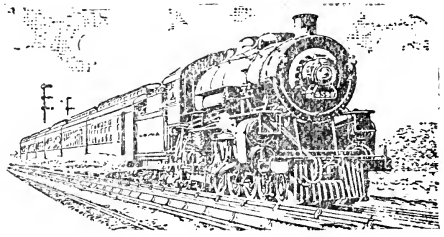
answered to hold him for her arrival. Do you remember, Harold, when she came, how she was all dressed in silks and diamonds and yet picked up that little ragged and bedraggled looking boy and almost hugged and kissed him to death? And those letters we receive now and then tell a story of a satisfied mother's love, and are these letters not a far greater reward to us than all this world's gold?" And then Mrs. Braxton had another weeping spell.

To console her Mr. Braxton remarked: "Buford will come home some of these days, Helen. He merely had his heart full of boyish dreams and longings to see the world that he had heard and read so much about and that he had been so eager to see, so when the rascally stranger the colored woman had seen at midnight, prowling in the shadows of the trees near the entrance-gate, no doubt promising to show him the cities and the countries he had longed to visit, the temptation to see these sights with his own eyes mastered his prudence and as he did not dare to ask for our consent, he ran away." "I remember, wife," he continued, "how my grandfather used to tell me how he too, ran away from his parents when a small boy and landed in the big city of New York with just two single silver dollars; how he found a job as cabin-boy on a 'clipper', then the fastest sailing vessels in the world, which was bound for the gold regions of California; how he landed four months later, after racing down the Atlantic, around Cape Horn and again up the Pacific, at San Francisco; how he received sixty dollars for the trip and deeming himself wealthy, found after landing on shore, that a pair of rough boots made of rawhide cost him twenty-five of his hard earned dollars and everything else in equally steep proportions. He became a pony express rider, conveying the mails to the Pacific Coast over the Overland Trail, by means of fastest horses and quickest relays. Later on

"Oh God! Bring back our wandering boy before his mother loses her mind."

he went into business, prospered, sold out, then returned with his fortune to Kentucky, purchased this farm and built this, our own house. Who knows, perhaps our boy has the restless blood of his great-grandfather coursing through his veins? So, Helen, dearest wife, do not worry, Buford will be with us soon, something strange seems to tell me that he is right now on his way to beg our pardon for his boyish prank."

Under these soothing words Mrs. Braxton's grief gradually subsided, and with her husband assisting her, and holding the lamp at such an angle that she could not again see the fateful date on the calendar, he led her to her bed-room, where, after affectionately kissing her upon her forehead he gently closed the door and returned to his own room. He did not go to sleep, but there, by the side of his bed, that strong, proud man prayed upon his bare knees for long hours to his Creator, to take from him this cross, that not only had robbed him of his child, had ruined his wife's health and happiness, but came dangerously near destroying the mind of her whom he loved better than life itself.



CHAPTER II.

The Call of the "Wanderlust."

HARDLY ever had the streets of Cleveland, Ohio, been more crowded with promenading people, than on the same July night mentioned in the first chapter. All during the sweltering day preceding it, people who had no important business to transact, requiring their personal attention, kept indoors, but now as the night with the cooling breezes off Lake Erie reduced the furnace-like temperature, they were crowding upon the streets, to give vent to the surplus of energy accumulated during an all day's imprisonment behind sun-baked walls.

Everywhere the all-day complaint about the terrific heat gave way to animated conversation and laughter, and the crowds, as they eddied up and down the streets, seemed to have completely forgotten that perhaps the morrow meant only a repetition of the dreadful heat of the day just passed.

In the midst of this human whirlpool, leaning against a lamp-post, stood the Author of this book, whose general appearance, dressed as he was in a natty business suit, would never have revealed to the casual observer that the wearer followed the dangerous life of a professional tramp.

I had landed in Cleveland at an early morning hour, after having crossed in almost record time, the snow-clad mountains, the deserts and plains which separate California, where I had wintered among the palms and orange trees, from the East, and during the withering heat of the day, I had taken a much-needed rest in a park, stretched out in the shade of a tree.

All about me was animated life and motion! The

swiftly moving street-cars, the hurrying automobiles, the racing police-patrols and ambulances, the rattling horse-drawn vehicles, the swirling, gayly-dressed throng of human beings supplied action, while the clanging of the street-car's gongs, the warning blasts of the auto-horns, the loud calls of the street-venders, the merry chatter and laughter of the passing crowd enlivened the picture.

And there I stood, staring with wide-open eyes, and yet I did not see, with hearing ears and yet I did not hear—seemingly I was alive, but in fact in dreams. I did not hear the tumultuous noises of the City, but I heard a voice within my innermost self, as it whispered into my ears, louder than all the noises of the streets, "Get out of this, A No. 1, this is no place for you. Go where action is real action, and life is made worth keeping! Come on, get out of Cleveland! You have been already here too long! Go where you hear real noises, the pounding of the wheels, the clicking of the rails! Get out amongst the woods and hills, away from these simmering man-made walls! Come now, let us go where motion is motion, to the very limit of human achievement."

Thus the voice whispered, implored, then threatened and finally seemed to choke me at the throat, and the more I fought against its ceaseless torment, the more I realized how fearfully I, too, like so many others, had become ensnared by this strange something, the "Wanderlust," so subtle and yet so strong, that whosoever follows its call more than once, always stays its victim, to be driven forth from destination to destination, mercilessly, without let-up and rest, hither and yon.

In vain I tried not to hear its voice, tried to escape its clutch, tried to move away from the lamp post, but seemingly my feet were rooted to the ground. Try all I might to hear the riot of noises about me, that strange voice

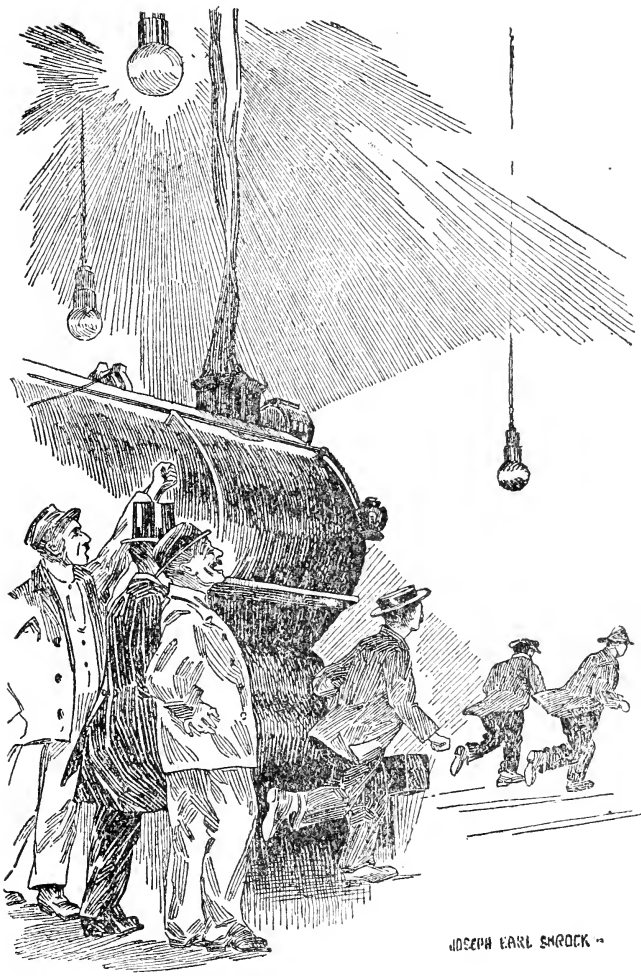
within me, shrieked far above it all! Then, unable to longer refuse to obey, I listened to its implorings, and Lo! a strange sickening feeling of oppression overcame me, the mighty City of Cleveland had suddenly became too small to hold me, so small indeed, that I could hardly breathe, and then some one seemed to push me away from the lamp-post and the next moment, with a bound, I was racing down the street, as if hounded by a fiend, to where I had hidden my overalls and snatching these, I ran to the New York Central Terminal. There I stopped long enough in its shadow to pull my overalls completely over my better clothes. Then, protected from observation by the stacked baggage I slipped through the baggage-room into the train shed, where, hiding behind the truck of an empty baggage car, I gave vent to a loud sigh, the sign of relief from the oppressive feeling, which only now, that I obeyed the "Call of Wanderlust," left me.

From Cleveland's public thoroughfares, free to be used by anyone, where the man who wears the City's blue uniform with its bright brass buttons and badge, was to me, only a guardian of the street-crossings, I had now landed with both feet at once, into the middle of the net stretched by the law over all railroad property and whose first command is: "Thou shalt not trespass," and at this moment every policeman—called in the vernacular of the road "John Law"—had become my deadly enemy. But I laughed at the very idea of one of those heavy-pouched, blue-clad fellows catching hold of an agile fellow like I was, who had on more than one occasion acrobated from the engine's tender back to the rear end of the caboose, by swinging and vaulting from truck to truck, underneath long freight trains running at top speed, with no member of the ever-alert train crew having discovered him. A tramp fears this class of "John Law," as a tiny mouse fears

a bulldog, merely as an undesirable man to meet, but the detective employed by the railroads represents to him, the "cat" in the mousing business.

There, as I was crouching behind the empty coach waiting for a chance to leave Cleveland, I fully realized the pitiful existence I was leading. I well knew, that a few days of honest employment and a little saving, would provide me with ample funds to gratify any sane desire to travel, and travel at that like a gentleman and be treated as one, while here I was hiding like a hounded criminal risking every moment, my liberty, limbs and life—a slave of the "Wanderlust." I was a victim of circumstances and had been so often arrested and punished for trespassing, that now I felt a bitter resentment against these who represent the law, and especially against those crafty, railroad sleuths, who were not only employed to protect their company's property, but actually my own and every other trespasser's life, against disaster and loss.

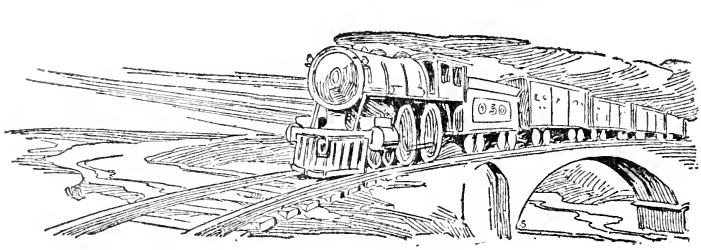
Just then the "Cincinnati Limited" pulled into the train shed. I watched from behind my hiding place two burly tramps lazily climb down from the "Blind Baggage" (the first platform behind the engine's tender). All of a sudden these two smoke-begrimed fellows seemed to come to life! They had espied a civilian dressed stranger running swiftly towards the front section of the "Limited" and their instincts must have warned them that he was their natural enemy—a railroad detective. In this they were not mistaken, for the way they ran down the tracks, their flying coat tails followed closely by the stranger, who, altho he was only one-half the size of each of them, yet represented the majesty of the law, was a rare sight. Forgetting my own danger, I jumped out from my hiding place and joined the crowd of people, who, standing in the brightly arc-lighted train shed were watching the chase after the



The two burly hoboes were chased by their sworn enemy, the railroad police-officer.

tramps, who gradually distanced the officer, making a "clean get-away" from the "John Law."

After a few moments the officer returned, angered at the escape of the burly hoboes and at the smiles the other people gave him for his failure to capture them. He kept close to the front section of the train, and standing close to me, he cast his eyes in the direction of my "Derby" hat, which, dressed as I was, otherwise in a regulation engineer's uniform, except the usual cap worn by all, caused his suspicions—that uncanny sixth sense every special agent seems to have—to rise, until his ill-disposed glances made me wince, and to allay his doubts, I stepped up to the engineer, who was just then engaged in giving a thorough oiling and inspection to his monster machine, and tapping him on his shoulder, on turning about I "glad-handed" him and said: "Brother, your 'old girl' is certainly well dressed for her next trip." These flattering words, as to the spick and span condition of his engine, spoken in the vernacular of the "eagle-eyes" of the rails, made by a man dressed in overalls, seemed to please him, and soon we were engaged in conversation concerning the merits and demerits of different makes and "brands" of locomotives, while now and then I would find a chance to glance at the detective, who gradually must have come to the conclusion that I was a new engineer of the road, for he turned his whole attention to the guarding of the train.



CHAPTER III.

"The Song of the Rail."

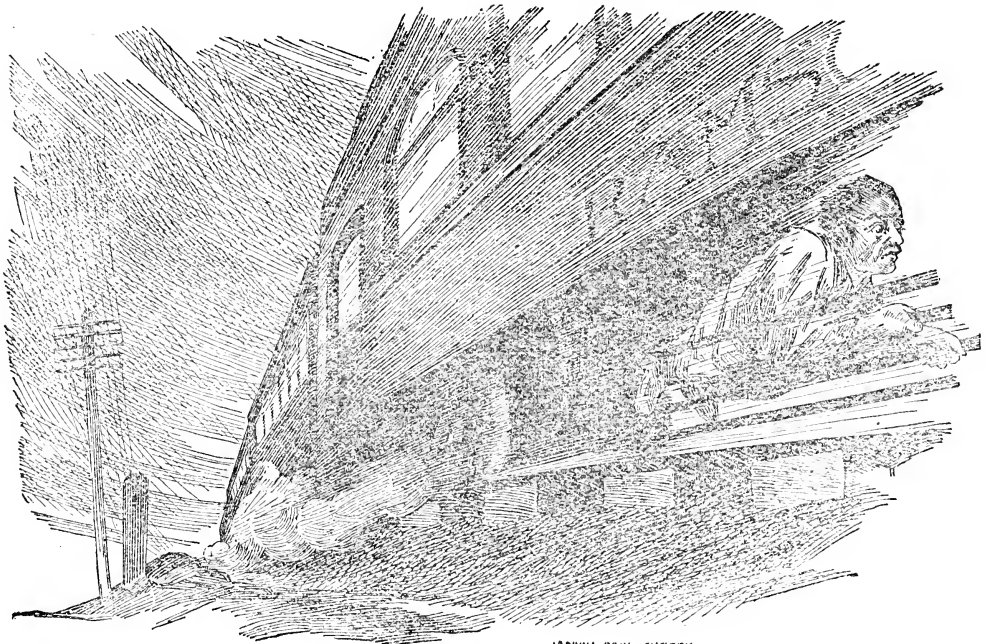
THE train shed certainly was a noisy place. The bells of the switching engines were clanging; the car inspectors—the human fireflies of the railroad service—were calling out orders and numbers, while inspecting the running gears of the glossily polished Pullmans. The shouts of the mail, baggage and express handlers vied with each other, the exhaust valves of the engines sent steam-plumes hissing into the air, while the rattle of the express and baggage trucks put the finishing touches to the deafening racket. But hark! Those shrill peals you heard above the din were the station bell-signal for the "Limited" to leave. The conductor's stentorian voice shouted "All aboard." The engineer, after looking at his watch, climbed into the cab, released the air-brakes, opened the throttle, and with the bright electric headlight showing the way, the ponderous machine's drive wheels, gripped the steel rails and the "Limited" commenced to move.

The engineer gave me a friendly nod, still thinking I was a "brother," while the special agent, ever anxious to catch a "pesky hobo," swung himself upon the "Blind Baggage." The heavy train began to gather speed. When the front part of the train entered upon a short curve, placing the detective's ever-watchful eyes at disadvantage, I made a sudden dash to the side of a Pullman, grabbed hold of one of the truck chains, and with cat-like agility, I swung myself upon the slender rods that upheld the center of the heavy sleeper and stretched across them as comfortably as only a tramp under such strenuous circumstances could do it.

Yes, here in the darkness, hanging under the Pullman betwixt life and death, at last I found what only seemed to satisfy that devilish something. There, so close to death, that a mere slip would have put a sudden, horrible finish to my career, at least the "Wanderlust" seemed not to prod me, and as I watched those wheels ahead and in the rear of me slowly revolve, squeaking as they passed the many cross-overs and switches, I at last felt that I had given up everything but life itself, to please that bane of my existence. The faster those wheels revolved, the easier I felt, and as we passed beyond the electric lights of the City and the train gathered speed from a soft purring and murmuring, they began to sing, and when top speed of a mile a minute and over was attained, they fairly screamed with joy. There, hanging on with only those weak, human hands, out of reach of any possible succor, speeding through the night, I felt at peace with all the world. The inky darkness was only broken when the lamp rays of some isolated farm house glimmered in the distance, or the lights of the stations, towns and cities we passed flying through, cast their weak glares, like far away beacons at sea, down there in the darkness of hell's own kitchen.

Hanging to those slender steel rods, I was merely a frail human being whom a sharp curve, a piece of dropping steel, a broken bit of rock or a thousand and one other causes could easily have cast under those whirling, screaming wheels while the heavy car above me danced, jolted, bounced and lurched.

Now I looked over at the wheels. In the darkness I only faintly discerned their blurred outlines, but I could plainly hear their thumping as they took the curves, their growling where the track was too tight against their rims, and their strange snarling as we climbed the grades, to be turned into a joyous screaming as we dropped down the



Hanging between heaven and earth and life and death racing at seventy miles an hour through the night.

inclines. Now we entered upon a level stretch of track. There was something uncannily strange about these man-made masses of rotating steel that no mere pen could describe. Seemingly they had come to life! As they raced over the shiny rails they commenced to sing "Clickity click" and "clackaty clack," which was echoed and re-echoed from truck to truck throughout the length of the train, and the faster the speed, the more playful their bouncing across the rail joints and the more jubilant their strange ode: "The Song of the Rails." Just then I looked at the wheels! I saw bright, fiery sparks fly from each one's rim! The engineer had applied the air pressure and like a horrid spider in the night, alongside of me, I felt and heard, but could not see the moving levers of the airbrake, pulling with might and main on the brakes, which in turn, like so many giant hands, clutch the twirling wheels, and now with a screeching, scraping noise, ground off their steel substance at the point of contact.

I heard two short blasts! I knew the signals of the road and took an extra strong grip upon the rods, for presently, crashing as if the finish had come, we flew over a place where another railroad at the same grade crossed our tracks. Again the compressed air did the work, a net work of rods and levers moved about, the brakes were released and soon we were rushing at top speed, onward.

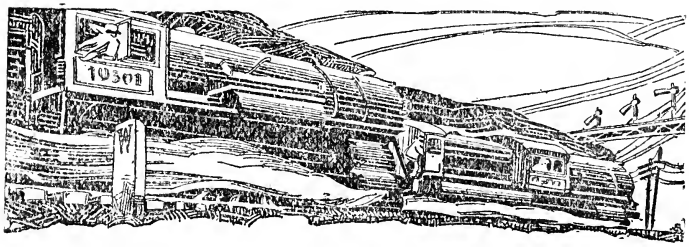
Through the long reaches of the night we flew, adding mile upon mile, until a shriek of the whistle, a suffocating smoke that shrouded the whole train, as the engineer closed the throttle, which deprived it of its steam support that had hurled its deadly fumes high up into the air; the slackening of the speed and the gradually working of the air-brakes, announced a stopping place. Now we entered the belt of bright electric lights that illuminated the environments, then we pulled up to the station, and another eighty

miles have been added to my record. I crouched as close as possible against the bottom of the sleeper above me, but I was almost certain of not being discovered, as well I realized that no one would suspect a human soul to ride down there in Hades. Only a few minutes to take on water, and we moved away again to repeat the twisting of the car-body as we swung around the curves, the same thundering when crossing bridges and embankments, the same "Song of the Rails" until the next station and the others beyond were reached.

Gradually as the night grew older, the everlasting same rhythmic thumping of the wheels became hypnotic by its monotony; nature too, demanded its toll of rest, my eyelids began to droop, only to be jerked open by a sudden effort. Again and again they closed! Although I realized that the least slackening of my hold meant a horrible death underneath those ghostly wheels behind me, which now, like arch-fiends with wide-open, slobbering maws were only waiting to grind and crush me into a scattered mass of quivering, bloody pulp; yet it seemed almost impossible for me to resist the all overpowering drowsiness and keep awake another moment. Again my eyelids drooped! With almost superhuman effort once more I roused myself, I pinched my limbs, in terror I rubbed my eyes, I commenced to sing, but even the singing became a mere stupefied effort of a man who faced his inevitable doom. Gradually my eyelids drooped again, I could not open them, I dreamed of happy childhood days, I felt my helpless hands relax their hold, I felt my tired body slide between the slender rods, down, down, down— —.

But hark! What was that strange call that seemed to force my consciousness back to activity? I listened and I heard shrilly shrieking, marrow-shivering cries above the roar of the rushing train. Slowly, half-conscious, I opened

my eyes and gazed about me and then, there in the darkness I heard the wheels scream louder and louder, "Keep awake, keep awake, keep awake!" until, in utter horror at the thought of the ruin I so narrowly escaped, trembling like an aspen in a storm, I shrieked back as a reply to their warning: "I am awake, I am awake, I am awake," and the faster and louder they called, the quicker I replied, until I again aroused my full reasoning faculty, and then I thanked high heaven that at the last moment I had more correctly interpreted the "Song of the Rails" than had the uncountable other victims of the "Wanderlust" who fell under the wheels and had "greased the tracks."



CHAPTER IV.

"The Kentucky Kid."

IT was broad daylight when the "Limited" stopped in the center of the train shed at Cincinnati, and I had added another two hundred and sixty miles to my total mileage of slightly over a half a million, all of which I had traveled in the same and even more dangerous fashion I have just described. The "Wanderlust" in me had been now satisfied, at least for the time being, and completely exhausted I climbed out from the "lowest berth" of the Pullman I stopped a moment to stretch my aching limbs and to brush off the heavy layer of dust that during the long ride had gradually covered my overalls. I looked about to find a way to the street, but look, who was coming here running towards me as if life depended on it! One other look—I espied a badge pinned to his coat, and down towards the yards I ran as fast as my tired feet would let me, while the other fellow's shouts for me to stop, only made me run all the faster. On I went, and he after me, but only for a short while I could keep up the gait, as, by his foot-falls, I could hear that he was gaining on me every step—and believe me, it's a mighty big difference seeing some one getting chased, than when that some one is one's own sweet self.

I did not even dare to look back over my shoulder, but I knew he was only a few feet from me, constantly yelling at the top of his voice: "In the name of the law, stop!" which caused me to push my exertions to escape to the limit of my departing strength, as I hated the very idea to spend six months in the Cincinnati Workhouse. But I could not last much longer, as I had battled all

through the long night without a wink of rest with grinning death himself, and now this fact told against me. Just as I decided to "stand and deliver" my luck played a trump. Across the tracks a passenger train pulled out of the shed. With one last effort I dashed over the rails and panting like a hunting hound, with the last vestige of my strength, I swung upon the rear vestibule of the last coach, then turned around to see the foiled officer with shouts and windmill arm-motions trying to have some one stop the train, but my luck held out—the mouse by a scant hair's breadth had escaped the cat.

Before I could travel beyond the, for me, dangerous vision of the special agent, the train was running too fast to risk jumping off, but as it is almost as risky for a ticketless, soot-begrimed trespasser to be caught by the conductor I had to make somehow, a hasty "get-away."

So I climbed upon the rickety safety-gate of the vestibule and while the train crossed the Ohio River—I had crossed the same bridge many times before—I swung myself upon the roof of the lurching coach, out of sight and out of reach of everybody aboard the train.

But such is the bane of the "Wanderlust" that within a few minutes after my narrow escape from the "hook of the law" I had completely forgotten it, as adventures of all classes follow each other in rapid succession on the road.

We were now steaming through Cincinnati's suburban towns, through railroad yards and then out into the open, amongst the blue grass farms and the hills of Kentucky. I was still resting in a cramped position upon the rear-cap of the vestibule and now that we had left the settlements with their "finger-pointing"—the "give-away" sign for the tramp—population behind, I straightened a bit and cast a hasty glance over the top of the speeding train.

I dashed across the rails and swung myself upon the rear vestibule of an outgoing train—the mouse by a scant hair's breadth had escaped the cat.

There ahead of me, stretched full length upon the roof of the coach, his head covered by his pulled-up coat to keep the red-hot cinders, thrown out by the engine, from entering his eyes, lay another tramp. "Say, A No. 1," I chuckled in glee, "here is a sure-enough partner, do go over and get acquainted."

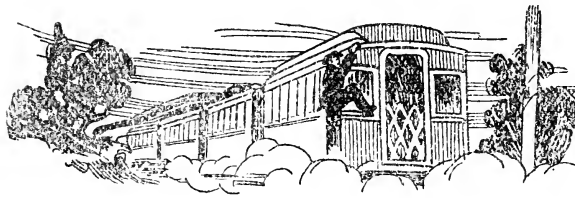
Ever on the alert for telegraph wires, bridges and tunnels, all of which mean a sudden finish to a tramp if picked up by them, I slid alongside the stranger and shouted a greeting at him, but the roar of the train was such he did not hear me, and playfully I poked a finger into his ribs to call his attention to my presence, but this caused him from sheer fright to almost roll off the swaying car, and as he pulled away his coat, I saw that the "fellow-Bo" was only a lad.

"Hello, Kid! Got scared?" I shouted at him above the noises, as I saw that he had turned pale and was suspiciously eyeing my overall railroad uniform. "I am a 'Scenery Tramp', I am A. No. 1, the Rambler," I greeted him in accordance with the usage of the road. "I am the 'Kentucky Kid'," he replied, proving by his prompt answer that he was a "Road Kid." "Been out long?" I asked. "Just an even year to-day," was his response. "Which way for you?" I, in turn inquired. "Home as fast as I can reach it," he replied. "Where do you call your home?" I asked. "Eight miles out in the country from the next station," he rejoined. "Homesick, eh?" I asked, and looked him straight into his eyes, and with a peculiar twang in his voice, he abruptly replied: "Yes." "Good boy," I said, "you are wise; look at me, over a quarter of a century on the road and now I have not even a home."

And then, while the train was clipping scenery out of the landscape at a mile a minute rate, he confided to me

that he had left his good home just a year ago, had a spell of remorse and was now returning.

Just then the engineer gave a long whistle for a station. "This is where I get off. Good-bye Bo," he said, and paused, then he continued, "Good-bye the 'Road' and the cursed 'Wanderlust', it's 'Home, sweet Home' and mother after this for me!" And then we shook hands and just as he clambered down the rear vestibule, while the brakes were gripping the wheels, he shouted back: "I wonder if mother will love me as well as she did a year ago?" And he was gone. While the train came to a standstill I pictured the happy mother, a happy boy and their happy reunited home.



CHAPTER V.

"In the Toils of the Law."

I moved over to the uttermost edge of the off-side of the roof from the station, so as to be as much as possible out of the view of the passengers, and patiently waited for the train to pull out and on again, when a gruff voice, directly below me on the ground called out: "Hey, there, you hobo, come down from your perch and be quick about it."

I looked and to my horror found that it was a "John Law," who, with one of his hands entwined around the neck of the Kentucky Kid, held in his other hand a large caliber pistol, pointed threateningly in my direction, while repeating his command. "All right," I meekly replied, and rising, I crawled to the rear end of the train—I knew that the "cat" had caught a "mouse" this time.

I clambered down the coach's vestibule amidst the yells and jeers of several dozens of the homeliest "Reubens" I had ever seen. "Hold on to him, Joe!" I heard the officer commanding another fellow to take charge of me, "I reckon we have got the whole family! An old 'Bo' and a young one." Then a coarsely dressed "Cy" took hold of me to prevent any attempt to escape. Then, as if a public exhibition of his vigilance was required, they marched us through the streets to the office of the "squire," as they called the police judge.

"Time is money!" for while yet the merry whistling of the train that brought us could be heard in the distance, we stood in front of the bar of justice, a decrepit and shaky table, at which "his honor" the squire was seated.

"Hey there, you hobo, come down from your perch and be quick about it!"

I had been through this "mill" of justice many times before and had only eyes for the "squire" so as to "unveil" for him an excuse that would match exactly with my observations as to his personality. He was an elderly, white-bearded, one-armed man and looked "respectable" to me, but there was one fault I promptly noted, he could look no one straight into the eyes, a palpable sign that their owner was absolutely unprincipled.

Now the officer carefully searched our clothes. In mine he found a peck measure full of a complete assortment of all necessities a tramp needs on the road to keep in "shape," while only a handkerchief was found in the boy's clothes, but while searching him, the officer pushed up the boy's left arm coat sleeve, and there discovered a tattooed monogram consisting of two intertwined "B's" on his forearm. "B . B." the 'John Law' remarked, "Are those your initials?" But the Kid did not answer his question.

Then came the trial. My assumed name was registered and when the squire wanted to know if I wished to plead guilty or not guilty to the charge of trespassing, and if I had anything to say, I entered a plea of guilty, as we were caught "dead to rights," and then gave the excuse I had framed beforehand that I thought would arouse the squire's leniency. Then the squire, never looking in my direction, but busy with the bible on which we had sworn to tell the whole truth, said briefly: "Five dollars and the costs of the court, or sixty days at hard labor on the chain-gang. Next case!" Thus he sentenced me, finished my trial and commenced that of the Kid with the same breath.

The Kid stood up and the officer had to pull his cap from his head, his fingers too were twitching, and his eyes, riveted to the floor, proved conclusively that this was his first experience facing the law. "Your name," curtly

asked the squire. "Billy Brown," answered the boy with a hardly audible voice. "William Brown you meant." promptly corrected the squire. "No, sir," stammered the lad, and after pushing up the coat sleeve he pointed at the tattooed monogram of the intertwined "B. B." and said: "My name is Billy Brown."

"Well, that does not make any difference to the court, but how do you plead to the charge of trespass—guilty or not guilty?" retorted the squire and the lad commenced to shake and cold beads of perspiration exuded from his forehead, as he seemed to realize the portent of the question. He wavered a moment, then, there in the midst of the snickering court room audience he sank upon his knees and pleaded with the squire not to place the "stamp of shame" upon his young life by sending him to the chain-gang, where in all his life he had never been before, but to permit him to depart so he could reach his mother, who was waiting for him and he solemnly promised if given this one chance in all his life not only never to beat another train, but never to leave his home again. And while he pleaded the tears he shed plowed white furrows through his soot-begrimed face.

When the lad had finished and had risen from his knees, complete silence, broken only by his sobs prevailed in the court room. Then the squire asked the boy to tell him what place he called his home and under the heavy grime covering his face, a vivid red appeared, as he replied: "Atlanta, Georgia, sir."

Then the squire turned to the officer and asked him what he thought would be the best to do, and I heard this leather-hearted scoundrel whisper: "I do not care a snap for that strange boy, nor do I believe his sworn-to story, but as I do not receive a salary, I certainly need the fee the court pays for his conviction," and then, as he noted

that some of the audience had overheard his callous answer, he added, "and too, my son John needs medicine."

And then the squire pronounced the boy's sentence. "The law provides that every crime be punished. You have pleaded guilty to a crime under the statutes of this state and I assess you a fine of one dollar and the costs of the court for trying your case or five days at hard labor on the county chain-gang."

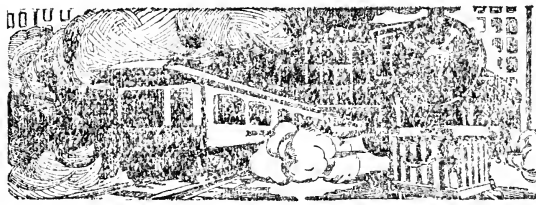
This was all he said, but I could tell by the way the sentence affected the Kid, that a death sentence might just as well have been pronounced upon him.

I had a few dollars in my pockets and thinking that such a small matter of merely taking a couple of trespassers down the street and sentencing them, would hardly cost more than the funds I commanded, I inquired of our captor concerning "the costs of the court," and he tartly informed me: "Only twenty-two dollars."

So, had we had the cash we would have satisfied the stern law by a payment of six dollars or sixty-five days at hard labor, while it took forty-four dollars of the taxpayers' money to settle the bills of those who administer the law.

(The costs of court vary from $2.00 to $35.00 in different states. Had a railroad detective, who always receives a salary from his company, made the arrest and passed judgment, it would not have cost the taxpayers a single cent. Is it then a wonder when the farmers (also the Railroad Companies, who are as a rule the heaviest tax-contributors) who must foot these court bills, and who know all about the cost of the products of their fields, but are densely ignorant as to the money paid out in "court costs" marvel as to the cause of their ever-increasing burdens of taxation. which would be greatly reduced if all officials were placed upon a straight salary basis, as

this is done in all progressive communities, instead of the costly and antiquated: "We pay you so much cash, each time you can manage to make a conviction.")



CHAPTER VI.

"The One Place Where 'Home, Sweet Home' is Never Sung."

"COME, you fellows, hold up your hands, so I can place bracelets on them," roughly commanded the officer, putting an end to the court—a tragedy as far as the Kid was concerned, who stood listlessly and all crumpled up as if in a dream—and he shackled one of each of our hands into a pair of steel handcuffs and pushing the lad, who was almost paralized at this additional shame, ahead of him until we reached the sidewalk, he marched us, followed by town hoodlums, with whom our guardian-angel exchanged coarse jokes at our expense, right through the "Saturday crowd" upon the streets to the county jail, as this town happened to be the county seat.

It proved a veritable "Road to Golgotha" for the Kid, who, with low-bowed head, concealed all the more his soot-begrimed features from possible recognition by friends of his family or even relatives as we passed through all those prying eyes on the crowded streets.

When we entered the jail, I, trying to cheer the Kid, jested: "Kid, five days will quickly pass. In again! Out again! Gone again! That's the way of the 'road'." But all he answered was: "But the disgrace will never fade away."

When the jailer had us exchange our clothes for the zebra-striped suits of shame, which he handed us, the Kid drew a small locket from his pocket, which he hastily opened, and while I glanced over his shoulder, I could see him kiss a picture in it, the portrait of the most beautiful

woman I had ever seen, and then he carefully hid the locket in the striped habiliments furnished by the authorities.

Now the jailer marched us to the cell-house and there locked me into an empty cell, while in the adjoining one—separated only by a thin steel-plate partition—he locked the Kid. But hardly had the jailer left him, a relaxation from all he had gone through came, and there all alone, as if the cold prison-cage were a high altar in a grand church, he prayed, moaned and sobbed.

"Say, Kid, what is the use to take anything like this so to heart!" I tried to comfort him, speaking loudly through the thin partition. "You should not worry so, because all will be well when you get out and land safely at your home." He made no answer, but his sobbing increased all the louder, and I knew that not the short five days imprisonment, but the shame of it was eating at his heart.

A little later, I again attempted to console him. "Kid," I shouted, "you should be jolly instead of sobbing, if you remember that I was handed sixty days for the same offense and that I am glad I did not get six months." But not until close to the hour, when on Saturday, the chain-gang prisoners, who had to work during the week upon the public roads, were brought in to bathe, wash and rest, the Kid found his composure.

At dusk the other prisoners arrived and all were locked into the different cells, in pairs. A lanky, sober-faced fellow became my cell-mate, who, after we briefly exchanged greetings, sank down upon the hard pine board—our bed—completely exhausted by the work in the chain-gang during the week just passed.

Through the bars of my cell I could see the jailer lock a swarthy, ugly pug-faced, heavy-set fellow into the cell with the Kentucky Kid. A moment later, in sharp con-

trast to my own wearied cell companion, he boisterously shouted, so it could easily be heard all over the cell-house: "Hello, Kid, how goes it?" And in less time than it takes to tell, he had Billy Brown talking, nay, actually loudly laughing, as he repeated to him funny experiences of the jail and the chain-gang, carefully avoiding to mention the dark side of that terrible life.

Through the thin partition, I could hear him adroitly questioning the lad as to his past, but Billy Brown told him the same story he told in court and that Atlanta was his home.

Then came the fellow's turn to give the boy his reason for being a prisoner. He told him—proudly as if he was a hero—how he had been caught red-handed, burglarizing a store, but with the means furnished by his pals, a smart lawyer was engaged, who through shrewd dickerings with the "Powers that be" managed to have the burglary charge reduced to one of simple trespass, for which the one-armed squire had condemned him, without the alternative of paying his fine, to thirty days on the chain-gang—but had not forgotten to assess the usual costs of the court as a reward for the trouble of sentencing him. And thus the scoundrel finished his story: "Money and a lawyer can do much! The law is flexible and justice can easily be blindfolded. Hurrah!" he gleefully shouted, "five days more and I will be at liberty and shall make a bee-line for the gold regions of California!"

Now the Kid informed him that he, too, would be set free on the same day. "What are you going to do, my lad, when you get out of here?" inquired the crook. "I am going home as quickly as I can, Sir," replied the boy. "We do not 'Sir' and 'Mister' each other in a jail, my boy," the Kid was instructed by the other fellow, in the ethics of the pen, we are all 'brethren of trouble', so call me by my

first name 'Jack' or my monicker 'Railroad Jack." You are going home, Kid?" he resumed the conversation after a pause, "but what are you going to do at home, after all these other fellows here have become your 'friends', who, when they again meet you will blackmail and tell all, that you have been here, a striped prisoner." "Tell on me?" innocently replied the Kid. "What can they tell on me? I only beat a train to reach my home, and—he paused in his sentence—Atlanta is far away." "Say, Kid," was Railroad Jack's ready reply, "if you were to hide yourself half way around the world ill luck always sends its messenger, some day, perhaps years later, one of these fellows will meet and recognize you, and hound you from pillar to post with blackmail, and then when you are tired of it all—tell their story." It seemed as if these words struck complete terror into the Kid's mind, for presently he feebly inquired: "What shall I do, Jack, if I cannot go — ?" The rest of his question was drowned in the turmoil the hungry prisoners made, as just then the supper bell rang, clamoring for their scanty food, which was shoved to them upon tin plates through an opening at the bottom of the steel barred doors. Our food, as all that served in the future to us, was of the coarest, unhealthiest imaginable kind, but what can a prisoner expect to receive from a sheriff, who is paid to "feed" him, but does not receive a cent for this work?

Supper over, we were turned out to exercise into the "Bull-ring," the open space about the cells, and forty prisoners, charged with all the different offenses upon the criminal calendar tried to amuse themselves as best they could, shut off from the outside world in a cold, damp county jail.

"Railroad Jack," by reason of his crime, the latest of a long criminal career, as I later discovered from the other prisoners, who knew each other's pedigrees as only an ex-

pert business man knows his own business or profession, was the recognized leader—as it is always the rule among criminals—of the jail and proposed that each one of us should sing a song to pass the time. After he had made an open space amongst them, he sang—no doubt prompted by his not distant discharge from custody—"There will be a hot time in the old town to-night," while all joined in singing the lively refrain. When he finished he was given a round of applause. Pleased at this acclamation, Railroad Jack called upon Billy Brown to sing the next song. At first the Kid refused to sing, but after all the other prisoners begged him to do so and every one had become a silent listener, he stepped into the open space and then, clear as glass bells came the first words of that beautiful song: "Home, sweet Home." Then bedlam broke loose! It was not as if sane men, but dangerous lunatics had been the listeners, such a storm of cat-calls, shouts, yells, even curses put a stop to the Kid's efforts to please the prisoners!

Poor Billy Brown! With tears streaming down his face, forced out by such a rough demonstration by men he had considered well-disposed towards him, turned to Railroad Jack, who explained to him the lamentable error he had committed to attempt singing the one song that is never, under any circumstances, permitted by prisoners in any penal institution in the world to be sung, that song of songs, "Home, sweet Home." There was no further singing that evening, but from that moment on Railroad Jack, the criminal, was considered by the Kentucky Kid, the harmless, runaway boy, his protector and best friend.

At the stroke of nine we were locked up for the night and stretched upon my bed—the hard pine board—until in complete weariness I closed my eyes, I could hear that scoundrel Railroad Jack by well chosen words, argue the resolution to go back to his home, out of the boy's head

The boy commenced to sing "Home, Sweet Home." Then bedlam broke loose, as this "song of songs" is never, under any circumstances, permitted by prisoners to be sung in any penal institution in the world.

by picturing to him the terrible disgrace that would not only shame him, but his mother and his family as well, should he ever be recognized.

Sunday, all through the long day and far into the night, after again we had been locked up he preached to the boy, from every possible point of view the self-same sermon, and just when I turned over in my hard bunk to go to sleep, disgusted with Jack's strange notion to keep the boy from going home, I heard the lad sob out aloud this question: "Jack, what can I do to escape this awful exposure you tell me about?" And then Railroad Jack quickly answered: "Billy, my boy, I neither can stay here after what I have done; 'Misery loves Company', so let us go together to the gold regions of California and make our fortune. When we are rich we will return—and rich men do not need fear exposure," he paused, then said, "Good-night, Kid, let's go to sleep."

All during the night, the Kid kept me awake by wild shrieks, he uttered in his dreams, and by listening to his incoherent mumblings I knew that he was dreaming of the riches he would gather in the Pacific-West to place at the feet of his mother—instead of returning there now, altho he had only been disgraced by having worn the zebra-garb of the felon, for just five short days.

Luckily for the Kid it rained Monday, and we were not taken out to labor upon the road; Tuesday it rained some more and Wednesday it was considered too wet to do anything, so the prisoners were given the freedom of the jail, permitted the liberty of the bull-ring from dawn to dusk.

And every moment through all this time Railroad Jack and the Kid were inseparable companions, always planning and plotting how to win fortunes for themselves

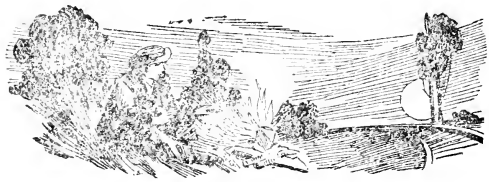
out "West"; altho at that moment Railroad Jack had only a few dollars to his name—which he had kept out of the clutches of his lawyers—and the Kid had not one red cent.

Late on Wednesday evening, almost at locking-up time, I had my first chance to speak to the Kid alone, while Railroad Jack was "visiting" another prisoner who was sick in his cell. "Kid," I inquired, "what are you going to do?" And as he did not reply quickly, I continued: "Billy, it's only eight miles to your home. Why not do as you prayed to God when they placed you in the lonely cell on Saturday?" "Mum is the word on the road and mum is the word in this jail, everybody to mind his own business!" he crankily replied, and then added, "and what is the use to go home now a penniless ex-convict, when I can first go to the gold regions of California, make a fortune and return like a gentleman?" "Remember Billy, my own fate," I pleaded, "go home now and make a new start in honest life, safe from the curse of the 'Wanderlust' that had almost claimed you." "No, no," he replied, and just that moment Railroad Jack was loudly calling for him, "it's me for the West and a quick fortune first, and home and mother later," and he was gone.

That night an angry fist pounded against the partition, arousing me out of my slumber, and when I demanded what was wanted, a voice threateningly growled: "Say, you fresh, gray-haired guy! What's that to you if this Kid goes with me to California or not? You ain't his pa, are you?" It was the voice of Railroad Jack, and no doubt the guileless boy had repeated to him my well-meant warning against the "Wanderlust." A minute later he again pounded against the weak partition, and this is what he said to my response as what more he wished to know: "It's your luck that I and Billy will be let out of the jail before you others

are permitted to leave your cells, or what I would do to you, be plenty."

Next morning at the break-of-day, Railroad Jack and the Kentucky Kid were discharged in company—one a confirmed criminal, the other only five days previous, a runaway, but homesick boy, who was then trying to reach his home.



CHAPTER VII.

"The Prayer of the Convicts."

BREAKFAST over we were told to "fall in line," and a long chain studded with handcuffs, which, two feet apart, were riveted to it, was brought forth and into these the prisoner's wrists were clasped, the left wrist of one to the right one of the other, ten pairs of prisoners to each chain and two chains to hold all.

We were loaded upon two road-wagons, and then hauled through the main streets of the town, so that every human being got a good look at each prisoner, and as on each Saturday, with that day's crowd upon the streets, the prisoners were hauled back to the country-jail for their Sunday's rest to return on Monday, every prisoner for the balance of his life was a "marked" man.

One could easily tell by watching the prisoner's behavior, the length of time each one had been in the chain-gang. Look at those down-cast eyes of the young fellow in the front wagon! His name is Carson, who had been a prisoner only a single week, and who too, is a runaway boy with a home somewhere awaiting his return. He had been caught by a deputy sheriff ten miles from any railroad, while sleeping in an unused, tumbled-down barn, where he had found shelter for the night, after having in vain searched during the day for employment amongst the farmers. He even had a few dollars in his pockets when he was arrested and this prevented him to be charged with vagrancy. But what amounts this fact to an unsalaried officer, who must make convictions—or go to work like other folks!

Carson was charged with trespass, and the one-armed

squire had sentenced him to a fine of two dollars and the costs of the case or six months on the chain-gang as punishment for his one night's rest in an empty barn, and again twenty-two dollars, the "court-costs" had been divided amongst the "powers." Poor Carson, as I saw him staring into the bottom of the wagon, I only too well know, that in a few days, the guard, who was sitting along side the driver—also a convict and chained to the seat—with his back turned to the mules and with a loaded, ever-ready Winchester laying across his lap, will have ample opportunity before long to threaten to "whip" the lad if he did not stop taunting the public. Such is the result of this "public-show" system in vogue in many states, that it kills the last spark of reform and gives the hardened, long-term criminal companions of any harmless convict an unusually good chance to turn the latter into a vicious enemy of society.

Ten miles we were carried before we stopped at the "convict-camp." It was laid out in a glen of a woodland and consisted of the prison-van, our sleeping quarters, three tents—the largest the headquarters of the guards, the second the camp kitchen and the third a shelter for the convicts during rainy days—a kennel with four bloodhounds, a pen with a fat hog and a wooden shed to store the utensils used in working the public road.

We were unloaded and then unshackled. I was the only new-arrival, and the camp-trusty, a convict, who by divers means—good conduct, by telling on his fellow-prisoners, etc.—had been given by the guards the privilege of the freedom of the camp, besides better food and treatment, took me in hand to instruct me in the rules of the camp. Pointing at three tall pines standing in a triangle at the farthest points of the camp-grounds, he said: "That is the 'dead line,' do not step over that imaginary line, be-

cause the first time you do so, you get a "paddling,' the next time a 'beating' and the third time a 'skinning.' "

Then he showed me a large empty barrel and explained to me that across it the prisoners were staked while being whipped, he also let me handle the strap with which the paddling, beating and skinning was accomplished. It was a heavy piece of hide two and one-half inches across, three feet long and fastened into a wooden handle. It looked more like a harmless razor strop of large proportions, than the terrible instrument of torture as I later discovered it to be. (The frequent use of it by brutal guards and overseers had more to do to turn the prisoners into vicious brutes than had the more humane method of starving a "bad" man into submission, been employed.)

Now he took me to the dog kennels and showed me the blood hounds, trained to trail escaped convicts.

Up to now the trusty's voice had been one of command, but the nearer we approached the hog-pen the more friendly he spoke, and as we reached its side he pointed at the fat porker and quickly said: "Say, Bo, got any money?" I understood, he meant for me to give him a tip, which he would repay with favors. I slipped a dollar into his hand and remarked: "I expect you to do the square thing by me." to which he replied: "I am your friend and will do all I can to help you." Then we returned to the others, joining them at their dinner—the same bill of fare every day, year in, year out, of the coarsest food imaginable.

Dinner over, we were taken out to work on the road, watched by two guards with Winchesters, while held in leash by the trusty were two bloodhounds, ever ready to follow anyone attempting to escape. I was handed a shovel and was told to "dig away." There in the hot July sun I dug away with the heavy shovel until my hands commenced

to swell, then to blister and at last to bleed. I stopped a moment to rest. "Hey there, you fellow, take hold of that shovel," came the cry from the guard. He had commanded and I obeyed, I remembered the barrel, the strap and the "skinning" and dug away.

Again I stopped! My physical capacity to labor had been exhausted, I felt I had not sufficient strength to do another stroke. Then the gun butt of a guard was driven, without a word being spoken, into my back—and I dug away. But within me was created a boundless hate, so furious that it gave me superhuman strength to complete my task, a hate for the human brutes, who for a pittance of wages and almost the same quality of food doled out to the prisoners, were in turn permitted—not by the law, but by the closed eyes and ears of their superiors—to maltreat, nay, often coldbloodedly murder defenseless prisoners.

When just before dusk we were marched back to the camp, I was a complete shadow of my former self. All the "Wanderlust" had flown, a worn-out, sick-at-heart wreck—a maltreated convict was left.

Our supper, the self-same food as before, was handed us upon tin-plates. I placed mine before me, pulled out my handkerchief and covered my face a moment while in a faint—just a moment, but when I looked at my plate every morsel was gone, devoured by the others, who like hungry wolves were staring at me as if waiting for more—they were actually starving, just enough food being doled out to them to keep their souls within their bodies, their hands able to lift the picks and the shovels; the guards, the barrel and the strap—fear, not kindness—did the rest.

An hour later we were laid side by side, like so many sardines, upon the bare floor of the prison-van and our ankles were shackled to a large chain strung across its length.

And there we laid on the bare floor, side by side, the sick against the healthy; the murderer against the runaway boy — all indiscriminately mingled.

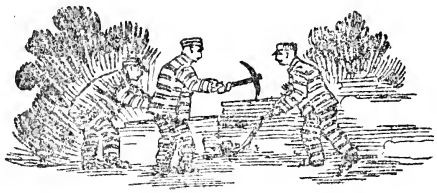
One illy-smelling lamp gave a sickly gloom, and four small iron-barred windows, a scant air supply to this foul inferno, while in the corner adjacent to the door, was a chair upon which a guard with ready whip and loaded pistol would sit, locked in, himself, by the others from the outside, to watch us through the night.

And there we laid on the hard floor side by side, the sick against the healthy; the young against the old; the murderer against the runaway boy; the confirmed criminal against the harmless offender—all indiscriminately mingled!

And just at twilight when dusk turns into darkness, inside this van, began the "Prayer of the Convicts."

"Oh! Lord, punish those who so unmercifully punish us! Oh! Lord, punish those, who so unmercifully punish us!" pleaded those tired, wearied lips in unison, repeating over and over these self-same words, which were only silenced when the guard entered, who took his seat upon the chair and was locked in, to watch us throughout the night.

Night after night, week after week, and year after year this "Prayer of the Convicts" is in unison repeated wherever prisoners are starved and maltreated, and the many plagues and pestiliences, which were unknown to the forefathers, seem to bear out the solemn fact, that God, the Almighty, heeds these strange prayers coming as they do from the utmost humility of human beings in sore distress, and dreadfully scourges those who permit and often abet this fearful shame.



CHAPTER VIII.

"At the Mercy of Human Fiends."

FORTY days had passed since my sentence, and I had become calloused to the constant "driving" of the guards and accustomed to the monotonous labor demanded of a convict on a chain-gang. I had seen "old hands," whose time had expired, discharged and "new hands," often times "repeaters," enter our ranks, while, with only one-third of my time to "do," I had become reconciled to my fate. I already counted the days till my discharge, and made plans for my future journeys, but especially how to get as quickly as possible out of Kentucky.

We were at work blasting away a rocky ledge with dynamite, that projected into the right-of-way of the road. We had drilled the holes into the hard granite, the charges of dynamite had been driven home and when the attached fuses sputtered, the guards gave orders to us to seek places of safety from the flying fragments. The explosion came, we returned to clear away the debris, when suddenly we were ordered to fall in line, and then, flanked by the guards, who menacingly fingered their cocked Winchesters, we were marched back to the camp—a convict had escaped.

Arriving there we were locked—chained and shackled—into the prison-van. Then the guards had the bloodhounds smell a garment belonging to the escaped prisoner, which then were taken back to where we worked, straining at their leashes, while the guards—no less eager to recapture the escaped prisoner, as they would have to pay out of their

meager salary, the $50.00 reward offered for his apprehension—followed.

The man-hunt then commenced. We could hear in our prison-van, the yelling and cursing of the guards, following the hounds, who by the sound of a peculiar note in their baying had found the scent and were trailing their prey. Gradually the echo of the man-chase died in the distance and we fervently hoped that the prisoner, who was none other than Carson, the young, harmless fellow who, no doubt, thought that fifty days of practical slavery was a sufficient atonement for a one night's rest in another man's empty barn, would make a clean "get-away."

Dinner was served to us in the prison-van in which we ate, chained to the floor. The day lengthened and we actually congratulated ourselves that at least one of us had the courage to get away from our cruel task-masters.

But all our hopes were shattered, for late in the afternoon they brought the poor fellow in, with his zebra-striped suit all torn and here and there spotted with blood where the thorns, the teeth of the hounds and the lashes of the guards had made the blood jump out of wounds.

They chained the boy to a tree in the center of the camp, rolled the "skinning" barrel into an open space, let us, still chained and shackled, out of the prison-van, made us sit in a circle around the barrel, and then the chief of the guards ordered the poor lad to be "pulled over the barrel."

When they unchained him from the tree, I could see the poor fellow pale as death, yet with defiance in his eyes, bite his lips to keep from screaming as two of the guards roughly dragged him to the barrel and after baring his back, "staked" him across it. Then the chief of the guards—"Flogging Master" is his official title—with bared arm, grabbed the strap, which had previously been soaked in

Then the "Flogging Master" grabbed the heavy strap, which had been soaked in water, pulled it through the sand of the camp ground, and then with an awful switch it came down with a resounding whack upon the bare back of that poor helpless boy.

water, pulled it through the sand of the camp ground and then with an awful switch it came down with a resounding whack upon the bare back of that poor, helpless boy, whose pitiful shrieks of mercy were promptly followed by blow after blow at the hand of the inhumane "flogging-master" until the unconscious, bleeding form of the little lad made further punishment useless.

We, who had been forced to witness this inhumane spectacle, knowing the trifling cause of their poor victim's presence in the miserable chain-gang, instead of a lesson to permit our cruel taskmasters to maltreat us all the more, sat silenced by the horror of it all, looking on, at the same time within us we were snarling like tigers at every lick of the strap as it fell upon the poor boy's bared back.

That evening, after we were returned to the van and time for our own united prayer came, we could hear choking sobs in the darkness, and the prayer itself could have never been repeated with more fervor in the grandest cathedral, than in our foul prison, while poor, young Carson, unattended by anyone, was lying unconscious upon a bundle of filthy rags, screaming in his delirium for his mother to come and help him—screams which cut all of us others to the quick.

CHAPTER IX.

"Honesty is Always the Best Policy."

A few days later, the "trusty" who, ever since the day of my arrival at the convict camp, when he, while instructing me as to the rules and regulations, accepted the dollar I slipped to him, and who since that first time, had made several other "financial" calls upon me, which he repaid by permitting me privileges granted, to none of the other prisoners, called me aside, and after the transfer of an additional half a dollar, he procured for me the coveted job as "water-boy," which meant that I would have to supply the chain-gang while at work with drinking water, a far easier job, as compared with the digging and rock pounding on the road, as now, equipped with a couple of pails, all I had to do was to bring water from the wells or pumps in the yards of neighboring farm houses.

Faithfully day after day I did this work, which offered me many chances to escape, but with only a few days ahead before unrestricted liberty would be my own, I felt no inclination to take the least chance, as I had seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears what the trusty meant when he spoke on the first day of paddling, beating and skinning.

And then, too, why should I run away now, that almost daily the good farmer folks at whose houses I filled my pails, gave me toothsome tidbits, such as pies, cake and bread spread with butter, all of which and all others, except unhealthy half-cooked cornbread, greasy salt pork and

badly baked biscuits, I had not tasted since I commenced to serve my sentence.

I also secured some old newspapers, which were considered "contraband", and which by stealth I slipped in the camp, giving several life-termers a chance to read after many days for the first time, real news from the outside world, as the only book permitted to be read, was the "Holy Bible."

One day, while on the public road going after a fresh supply of water, a faint sparkle in the dust caught my eye, perhaps the reflection of the sun upon a piece of broken glass, I thought; I do not know why, but as if by magnetic power, I stepped out of my intended route and gave the supposed piece of dust covered glass a kick.

But look! What was I kicking? What were those millions of sparkling rays that hurt my eyes, and that golden lustre I saw beneath the dust? I stooped and picked it up and held in my hand a heavy, diamond-encrusted bracelet. With the next move I had it safely hidden from view in the bosom of my prison suit, then I looked carefully about, to see if some one had not seen me making my find. My next thought was to rush back and hand my valuable find over to the guards. "No, no, A No. 1," I said aloud, as I felt my innermost self rebel against this, "those scoundrels will murder you for it." But what to do? I pulled the bracelet out of its hiding place and after removing every speck of dust, I took a sly look at my unexpected find and the more the rays of the diamonds penetrated my eyes, the more I became resolved to take fullest advantage of my newly acquired wealth.

"A No. 1," I chuckled aloud, "you are the luckiest kid under the sun. First you slaved two long months upon this road, and now it yields up its pay. Diamonds and

gold are easily convertible into good dollars! Pick out the diamonds, melt the gold into a nugget and convert both without a possible chance of discovery, into ready cash!" I paused to take another look at my precious find, then continued with embittered voice: "In a few days they will turn you loose upon this community, a stranger among strangers and every one against you, a despised ex-convict; almost broken in health by reason of the disgusting food they made you "feed" upon, while you gave for their benefit the last ounce of human endurance, and now on top of all, they will turn you out to make the 'new start' the law promised you, after you atone for your transgression, a penniless beggar. No, no, A No. 1, nix on giving up this real 'new start' you found." And following suit to the spoken words, I hid my treasure beneath the root of a willow growing by the roadside.

Keeping the whole affair a profound secret, I attended, as if nothing had ever happened, to my convict-watering duties. Only once each day, to assure myself no one had lifted it, I took a peep at my treasure trove.

Two days later, just before we were to knock off work in the evening, while I was filling my pails for the last time at a negro cabin's well, I overheard the colored woman, whose cabin-home it was, tell how a lady had lost, while upon an automobile trip, somewhere along the road, a very valuable diamond-studded bracelet, and how she had offered a reward to its finder and how the whole country side had for days been searching for the jewelry, but that all efforts had thus far been in vain.

No sooner had the woman finished than I inquired where this lady resided, and she told me, two miles from her cabin. Knowing I would never be permitted to leave the camp, without a second thought, I told the colored woman

to go and tell the lady that, I, a convict, had found her bracelet, and that she could have it by calling at the convict-camp. "Lawd," she exclaimed and down the road she went as fast as her bare, black feet would carry her to deliver my message.

With my water-filled pails I hurried back to the "gang" which, ready to march to camp, was waiting for my return, and as expected, one of the guards, ever ready to take every advantage to satisfy their craving for brutality, gave me a staggering blow with the butt of his gun, threatening at the same time, amid vile curses, to keep me "over-time" on the chain-gang.

We marched in and "supper" finished, after the usual brief rest, we were chained, shackled and locked up for another night, only three nights lacking to be my last one.

While repeating our convict prayer, we heard the loud hubbub, made by an automobile stopping alongside our sleeping quarters. Loud orders rang out, the door of the prison-van was thrown open, the chief of guards, holding high a lighted lamp, entered, followed by a negro woman and a richly dressed white lady, who, no sooner had she sniffed the foul atmosphere and seen how we unfortunates were manacled, turned to her husband, who had just squeezed himself into the small door, and exclaimed: "Oh! Harold, why cannot these poor wretches, who so greatly improve our roads, be at least quartered like human beings and not like wild beasts! I shall call in the morning upon 'their friend' the squire, and direct his attention to this horrid shame."

Now the colored woman, assisted by the chief of guards, carefully scanned our faces, and with the lamp's rays showing full into my face, when she came to look at me, she yelled, "Fo' de Lawd's sake, Missus, here shore he is!"

I found a diamond-encrusted bracelet in the dust-covered public highway.

Then the chief unshackled me and I was taken into his tent and there had to repeat to the visitors how I had found the bracelet in the open road and I finished by offering to guide them to its hiding place. But, would you believe it, the chief of guards, before we climbed into the automobile to be whizzed in record time to the willow, locked my wrists into a pair of handcuffs, just as if to prove to the visitors how absolute was the power he exercised over "his" prisoners.

When we arrived at the willow I was taken out of the automobile, and after the "chief of brutal scoundrels" had removed his steel "bracelets" from my wrists I was permitted to dig out from underneath its roots the diamond bracelet, which, like a "hero of old", I handed to the lady in the auto, who, no sooner had she got her fingers on it, pronounced a very curtly sounding "thank you," and ordered her chauffeur to "return home" and a moment later they were cutting a hole through the atmosphere while the chief quickly clasped his bracelets again upon my wrists and with a sneering "that's the proper way to pay convicts" ordered me to march back to the camp.

I do not know what was going on in his mind, but it seemed somehow he felt ill-humored, for presently he cut a stiff switch from the road-side and drove me, like I have seen boys drive geese, back to the camp, where he quickly shackled me to the chain in the prison-van, and I was soon sound asleep, dreaming what queer people sometimes those who lose diamond bracelets are.

The next day, the other prisoners, to whom—the latest piece of camp gossip—I had related my experiences, taunted me for giving up a "diamond mine" for a mere "thank you," while I, the same as if nothing had occured, kept attending strictly to my duties as water boy, filling my pails and quenching their thirsts.

When the dinner hour approached—as was customary when we worked not too distant—we marched back to the camp. After we finished our "feed," the chief of guards called me into his tent, and before I could say a single word handed me a dish full of dollars and bills with these words: "The lady whose bracelet you restored, sent her servant down here this morning to pay you these one hundred dollars as a reward for your honesty," and then pausing a moment, the "Flogging Master" continued, his voice sounding for all the world like a cat's soft purring, "And, my dear boy, what are you going to do with all that good money?"

My chance had come at last! I told him to call up the squire over the telephone and inquire how much money it would take to set me free. This he meekly did. The answer came back and was to the effect that my five dollars fine should be remitted, but that I must pay the "costs of court" to gain my liberty—plainly indicating which thoughts were ever foremost in the squire's mind. I paid the "costs of court", twenty-two dollars, for which I gained just three days of precious liberty, having served fifty-seven out of the sixty day's sentence. I also paid twenty-four dollars to buy the liberty of poor Carson, who was still limping, unable to work, about the camp.

We quickly exchanged our prison suits for our own—they were kept in a locker in the guard's tent—and after throwing a handful of silver dollars amongst the surprised wretches we left behind us, we two happy fellows made haste to reach the town.

We must have covered half the distance, when suddenly I felt there was something lacking to complete my happiness—I had omitted to thank the lady who had so generously rewarded me.

I stopped, and after explaining to Carson my reasons for wishing to return, I handed him a sum of money for his expenses, besides which I gave him a lot of good advice: to hit a bee-line for his home and mother before the "Wanderlust" could claim him, too, as a victim, and to shun the road in the future as he would rank poison. This he solemnly promised me to do and then we parted, he to return to his home to forget his frightful experiences, while I set out to find and thank my benefactress.

CHAPTER X

"Strange Discoveries."

IT was late in the afternoon when I stopped at the cabin-home of the colored woman, whose conversation had brought to me my good fortune, to inquire of her the direction to the home of the bracelet's owner.

The poor negro "mammy" threw up her horny hands in surprise, when she recognized me in my civilian clothes, looking so different, than when she picked me out amongst the sleeping zebra-dressed convicts, and exclaimed: "Fo' de Lawd, Massa! You sut'nly is de same man! Massa, but dem folks'es wah sut'nly tickled to death, when ah told dem yo' al had foun' dem di'mons an' den dey hitched up de automobile, and made me clime in wid dem! An' fo' de Lawd! Yo'all ought to hab' seen me whiz by de o'der cullu'd folks'es cabins, wid dem niggah's all cranin' deir necks to see what dis yere cullud woman is doin ridin' wid 'quality-folks,' jest like Elisha in his chariot."

Then she gave me the required information, and before an hour had elapsed, I entered a well-tended park, through which a winding path led me to the entrance of a grand mansion.

Faltering I stood before its portal, just an ex-convict, cowed to the very earth—instead of uplifted to the level demanded by society—by the hideous abuse I had passed through, and timidly I rang the bell.

A moment later, a liveried darky opened the door and when I told him I wished to meet the lady of the house, he,

haughtily asked for "my card." "My card?" I queried, "I am now free to —," and caught my words. Then I explained to him my errand, but hardly had I finished my story, waiving all empty formalities, the darky bade me follow him into the house, where, after we had mounted to the next floor, he knocked on a door, and which, on being bidden to enter, he opened, and then he almost pushed me into the center of a brilliantly lighted, beautifully furnished library, in which, seated at a book-laden table was a most handsomely dressed lady, whom I instantly recognized as the automobile-lady of the preceding night, who so very curtly thanked me for returning to her my valuable find. But now she arose out of her chair and while I, in complete confusion, commenced to stammer words of gratitude, she cut me short with most gracious civility by inviting me to be seated, and after taking my hat out of my trembling hands, she introduced herself as "Mrs. Harold Braxton," and bade me to be welcome at her home—"Braxton Manor." Fearful that my "hobo-monicker" would offend her, I gave her, as my name the one that at that moment came into my mind. "Albert Jones is my name," I replied, introducing myself, and then I tried again to thank the lady for her generosity, but she kept on lauding my honesty to the skies, and repeating, how at last, the seemingly impossible had happened—something that the squire and others of his stamp had so frequently preached to her: "that a man, once a convict in a chain-gang, was no better than the worst of them."

Thus she continued, never giving me a blessed chance to utter a single word of the speech I had framed up during the long seven miles' walk back to her home, past laborers at work in the fields; past people in gardens, and upon the porches of their homes; past playing children, who all

"Yo'all ought to hab' seen me whiz by de o'der cullu'd folk'es cabins wid dem niggahs all cranin' deir necks to see what dis yere cullud woman is doin' ridin' wid 'quality-folks', jest like Elisha in his chariot."

proved by their frowning, sneering faces, as soon as they cast their eyes upon my features, that the daily and weekly exhibitions in chains and of brutality, had been well absorbed by them, and that even year-long, complete humiliation would be any ex-convict's share, who should dare to efface by honest toil and endeavor the "Cain's Mark" of the chain-gang, by living amongst them.

The lady only ended her praises when she discovered in the course of her inquiries that I had not eaten supper, and then excusing herself, she left the library to order a meal prepared for me.

A few minutes later she returned, accompanied by a gentleman, whom she introduced as her husband, and now, for the first time since I entered the library, I had a chance to thank both for their generosity. After I had finished, and a few pleasant words had been interchanged, Mr. Braxton casually asked what I intended to do with the hundred dollars. And then I repeated to them, how they had not only given freedom to one convict, but also to a second one, and pictured to them, the joy and happiness of poor Carson, the runaway boy, at his release. Now the lady had me repeat the experiences the boy had gone through since he became a member of the chain-gang; how he had been maltreated; had escaped, had been recaptured, and how, on the night after he had been "skinned over the barrel" with the strap, while unconsciously rolling in delirium upon the filthy rags, he had so pitifully screamed for his mother to help him in his agony—, and then,—Mrs. Braxton fainted away. Her husband with the assistance of the colored butler, who had just entered the library with my supper upon a tray, which he placed upon the library table, lifted the good lady up and carried her out of the room.

For a moment I sat in complete astonishment, marveling why the lady should have fainted while listening to my only "tame" recital of the actual conditions existing in the chain gang, and while I pulled my chair close to the library-table, upon which my supper was waiting me, I wondered what would have been the result had she seen with her own eyes and heard with her own ears, the baying of the fierce bloodhounds; poor Carson's return from his foiled escape; the laughter and taunts of the guards; the blood covered barrel; the seared, bared back and the piercing screams of the boy; the loud switch as the heavy water soaked strap cut through the air; the circle of chained and snarling prisoners, and the hundred and one accompaniments which worked daily, making cowardly fiends out of prisoners, supposed to be punished and reformed for their transgression of the law by the deprivation of their liberty under strict, but not antiquated, inhumane conditions, and then I commenced to clear away to the last bite the bountiful supper, after I had missed so many meals—not "feeds." This was the first time after two long months that I had used a knife and a fork while eating. In the prison camp only spoons and the bare fingers were used, ever impressing upon the convicts, even while eating their poor rations, that they were considered brutes.

Then I sank into a soft rocking chair, awaiting the return of host and hostess to bid them farewell. I waited long and patiently and just at the moment, when I intended to take "French leave," thinking that Mrs. Braxton's illness was entirely too serious to permit attention being paid to my presence, the door opened and the colored butler entered, holding a silver candlestick with a burning candle in his hand and then opening apart the heavy sliding-doors separating the library from an adjoining room bade me to follow him and placing the candlestick upon a small

table standing in the center of this room, a grandly furnished bed-chamber, he whispered: "Massa Braxton begs to be excused, as Missus is so ill, but he shore would feel honored, if the ge'man will stay with us over night." Then he bowed himself out and closed the sliding-doors behind him.

I almost tumbled into a soft-upholstered chair and then, realizing that good fortune was overwhelming me, altho I felt sorry for having caused the gracious lady's fainting spell, I commenced talking aloud: "Skeets, A No. 1, your luck is rolling up in chunks," I said, and then I rubbed my eyes to make sure all was not a mere dream. "Honesty always pays big rewards," I continued my musing, "but I am certainly getting more than is due to me," and then I glanced at the splendidly appointed bed, that was to be my resting place. I arose out of my chair, walked up to it and as I fingered the silken cover, the lace-embroidery and all the rest, I came to the odd conclusion, that this was altogether too grand a bed for an ex-convict, who had been used to the hard floor for his bed and the ceiling for a covering, and I pulled off my coat, made it into a pillow, placed it upon the floor alongside the bed and a moment later, stretched full length upon the velvety carpet, after having repeated—impelled by sheer habit—the convict-prayer, adding to it a plea for God to bless the Braxtons for befriending a poor convict, I promptly fell asleep.

About midnight, in my slumber, I thought I heard a voice. As it is customary to call in the chain-gang's prison-van, when one prisoner wishes to turn over, to permit him to do so, all others follow suit, so I turned over; then I heard a voice again and once more I drowsily turned over; again another voice and when I turned this time, half angered at the constant calls for turning, I aroused myself and stretching my feet I missed the "feel" of the shackles and then I sat up and gradually remembered my lucky

change from the convict-van to a bed-chamber in a grand mansion.

But hark! What was that I heard? I listened, and there in the darkness of the bed-chamber, I could distinctly hear a muffled voice in the adjoining library. What could it mean? A burglar prowling through the house, and I accused in the morning of having robbed my benefactors? "Good God!" I exclaimed in my thoughts, as I realized my perilous position and pictures of the one-armed, fee-hungry squire, a long term in the chain-gang, the brutal, illy-paid guards, and the prison-van flashed through my suddenly wide-awake mind, and I noiselessly crawled upon my knees to where I thought the sliding-doors met, and then, after I felt for and found it, I carefully placed my ear against the crack—and sure enough, I heard a voice, and all atremble I quietly slid the doors, just a wee bit apart, looked through the tiny opening and saw, by the aid of a lighted lamp which stood upon the library-table, a lady dressed like a ghost in her white night-gown, with her back turned towards me, upon her knees, sobbing while pleading with God to save her own son from the fate that I had described during the previous evening was the reward of all runaway boys, who like young Carson, had left their homes to become tramps and as I looked, I could see by the reflection in a large, bevelled French mirror reaching from the library's floor to its ceiling, that the lady was none other than Mrs. Braxton. I carefully shut the sliding doors and crawled back to my former resting place upon the floor and there I lay and thought what a queer lady, after all, Mrs. Braxton was, first when she said so curtly, "Thank you," and then paid me a big reward for returning her property; then she had fainted dead away when she listened to poor Carson's story, something that happens daily on every chain-gang, and the climax was reached

now, when in the dead hours of the night, she crawled about the library on her knees sobbing and pleading with God, not to release those other three runaway boys, I left behind slaving, scarcely two miles from the Manor, in the chain-gang, but to save her own son from their and Carson's fate, which young man I had not the least doubt, was at this moment peacefully snoring on the floor above or the one below me, in an equally luxurious feather-bed, as the one they had furnished for my night's rest, dreaming of baseball, bathing, dancing with pretty soft-eyed girls and other such bliss, that goes to make royal dreams for youngsters—and while yet wondering, I fell asleep.

Convicts rise at break of day, and in the morning, through force of habit, I found it impossible to sleep beyond the regulation time, so arose, washed and brushed myself and placing a chair before an open window I watched the sun rise. But the discipline of the chain-gang as the time came "to fall in line" arrived, would not let me sit quietly upon the chair, so, queer as this may seem, I commenced to march—down the roadway—around the room, and while so marching, my eyes fell upon the unused bed, and remembering that its unused condition might cause suspicion, and that I was an ex-convict, I pulled back the covers and jumped and rolled about the bed. Then I marched around the room until I heard some one knock on the sliding-doors and sinking quietly into a chair, I bade the party to enter.

The doors were pulled aside and in came the colored butler holding in his hand a tray upon which a dainty cup of coffee was served, which he placed upon the table, and then noting that I was already dressed, he remarked: "Massa, you all sut'nly is an early risah, the othah ge'men nevah rises till nine," and then he bowed himself out of the open doors and left them ajar.

And then I drank the coffee! Real coffee with real sugar and real cream! "Lord," I chuckled, "the guards never had cream nor sugar in their coffee, and the convicts never taste real coffee!" After I had cleaned up the mocha, I once more stretched my limbs, and then, odd as it may seem, I longed for my water-pails, just for the sake of having something to do to while away the time. Finally an idea came. Why not read a book? I entered the library to select a suitable one from one of the many shelves. While looking for a book, I admired the many beautiful paintings hanging about the walls and my eyes were attracted by a veiled portrait above the fire-place, and through the veil I thought I could discern the likeness of some famous ancestor of the Braxtons. Impelled by idle curiosity I lifted the veil, and was almost stunned when I looked at, what I thought was a life-true oil portrait of "Billy Brown."

CHAPTER XI.

"Clearing the Mystery."

I ALMOST screamed aloud, so suddenly was I taken aback by this strange discovery! With a reeling head—it was only this which kept me from rushing into the hallway and loudly proclaiming my find to all the manor—I sank into a chair, and then commenced gradually to pick up the scattered threads of memory which had become unwieldy from the two month's sojourn on the chain-gang.

Perhaps after all I was mistaken, for how could a scion of the Braxton family be identical with Billy Brown, the Kentucky Kid? Was it possible that my failing eyes played tricks on me? I arose from my chair and stepped in front of the portrait, lifted the veil again and stepping back as far as my arm would permit, I carefully scanned every line. There could not be a mistake, it was the picture of "Billy Brown."

While looking I remembered, too, Billy's words, that his home was eight miles from the station and Braxton Manor, altho I had arrived by a round-about route, was just this distance from the railroad. But perhaps after all I might be wrong and cause a lot of ridicule for me, should I attempt to tell the Braxtons, that their son, who perhaps at this very moment was sipping his morning coffee, looked like the "hobo-kid" I had met several months ago. Oh no! That would not do, I must have a better proof than this mere likeness between two boys!

I rang the library-bell. The colored butler opened the door and asked my wishes. I bade him enter and after closing the door behind him I placed him in front of the portrait and then lifted the veil, and curtly demanded to know if it were not Mr. Braxton's portrait, painted when he was a school boy?

What was there so strange about this picture that the butler did not promptly answer? Why should he be stricken dumb and look into the fire place? Why should tears commence to drop down his dark-lined face? I repeated my question, while he fumbled in his pocket and pulled out his handkerchief with which he wiped away his tears. "Massa," he sadly replied, "my Braxton folks done tole me not to tell of Marse Bufo'd, but seein' that it's such a nice ge'man as yo'all, I is gwine to tell yo'all the truth. Fo'teen months ago to-morrer, Marse Bufo'd, the only child of my Marse and Missus, de fines' boy yo'all evah saw, dis'peahed 'bout midnight from dis yere manah and now, aftah a lan' wide search, we'all othahs hab gibben him up fo' lost, only my poah Missus, who prays all the time to de good Lawd above, to bring him back to her and make us all happy." Then he sobbed so loud he could not say another word, and I dismissed him from the library.

Hardly had he shut the door behind him than I again sank into the chair and became absorbed in my thoughts. What if, after all, I was at error? But no, that was not possible.

Piece by piece I connected the facts I had, thus far found, and all pointed to the loss of a son of the Braxtons.

At this moment, too, I understood the reason why poor Mrs. Braxton had fainted away, when she heard me tell how poor Carson, in his delirium screamed for his mother's assistance, and only too well I knew now the cause, which made her rise in the ghostly hours of the night to plead upon her knees in the library with God to save her son from the fate of young Carson—it was a mother's love for her offspring.

Then a devilish idea made me chuckle! I thought how the chain-gang until the preceding evening held less interest for the Braxtons than even their neighbor's hog-pen, but since their own flesh and blood, "Master Buford,"

the butler had called the son, was in danger of joining the "gang," how mightily that changed the matter! Ah! what a difference this made!

Once more I chuckled as an odd thought crossed my mind. What would happen, I thought, if the one-armed squire and other fellows who permit such barbarous shame, could only be forced to play convict for just one single week, to slave during the hot day, to feed upon filthy food and then to sleep at night in a foul-aired, vermin-crawling box, chained to a consumptive murderer, as I had been on the last night I slept in the prison-van?

Another thought! What if there had not been those twenty-two dollars "cost of courts?" The chances would have been good, that the squire would have ordered this and other runaway boys sent home, a by far less expensive method than wasting twenty-two dollars upon a farce, which turns—oftener than thought possible—harmless chaps into vicious criminals.

"Yes," I mused "it is not yet too late to incorporate into every state-code a law making it compulsory upon every judge to notify parents of runaway boys of their detention. Had this rule been in force this very moment "Billy Brown, the Hobo Kid" would be once more "Master Buford of Braxton Manor," and then—I looked very carefully about the room to make sure no one had, unawares, entered the library—I added loudly, "he could have never strayed very far away before he had been caught and returned to his anxious parents; could have never for a whole year been the companion of a grown-up tramp; could have never returned within eight miles of his good home only to wear the so-easily-changed, but never-to-be-forgiven striped garb of the felons; could have never been shut up in a narrow steel-barred cell with a criminal to follow this scoundrel out of the jail, to become lost in the wide, wide

world, and there would be, never again, a poor broken-hearted mother, pleading with all, and God above, for the return of her wandering boy," and then I wiped away a tear that would not stay confined.

"Perhaps after all I am correct," and it is your duty to tell the Braxtons where their son went," I remarked and I arose out of the chair, crossed the spacious library, took hold of the door-knob—and then let it go, to return to my former seat. "No, No! A No. 1, you must not make a fool of yourself or make infinitely worse what is already bad enough," I said aloud.

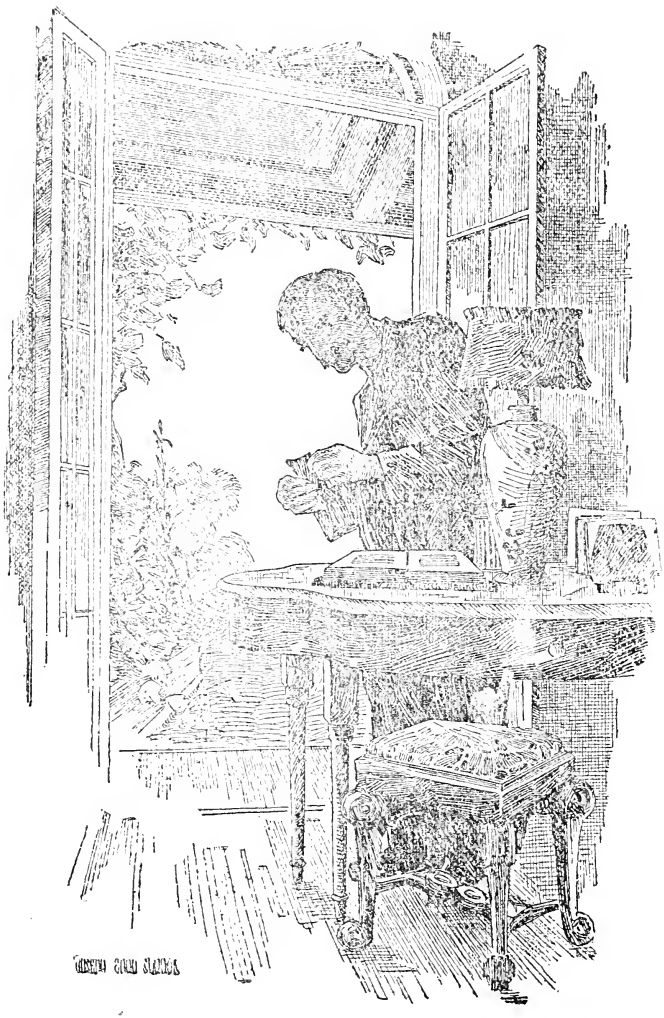
But thought followed thought, I was so plagued by them that I could not sit quietly, I walked about the library repeating word for word Billy Brown's utterances and word for word they fitted with "Master Buford's" disappearance and whatever I had heard and seen thus far in the manor. Once more I lifted the veil and gazed at the handsome face of "Master Buford" and recalled inch by inch the features of Billy Brown. "No, no, it could not be him! Altho they resembled each other! Roughly spoken, illy-dressed Billy Brown could never be this picture's original," I reasoned. But then, I remembered my own past days on the road, when a charitable lady soused me with a garden hose, so dirt-covered had I become. Certainly the "road" is not a cozy corner in a manor's library. I reflected on and weighed the consequences of telling the Braxtons what I knew. "A No. 1, better leave well enough alone! Why should you bother yourself with other people's troubles when this world is so large?" I said aloud and with these words I finally dismissed all the strange occurrences from my mind and resolved to bid the Braxtons farewell and to leave this neighborhood as quickly as possible.

To change the train of my thoughts, also guided by curiosity, I opened a large heavy-clasped photograph-

album, which laid in the center of the library-table. Idly I turned page after page, filled with pictures of friends and relatives of the Braxtons.

There were many unmounted ones between its heavy-leaved pages, and among these I picked out a small one, which showed "Master Buford" in the act of jumping high, holding a tennis-racket in his outstretched bared arm, while trying to catch a ball. Carelessly I threw the picture upon the table alongside a glass pitcher filled with water and continued looking at the others.

Several pages farther and I picked up some miniature photographs of ladies, made with a tiny camera. I scanned each one separately but just as I fingered the last two which happened to be duplicates, I turned around and looked at the veiled portrait as there seemed just then, something so uncanny about it that I stepped to it, lifted up the veil and gazed at it. It seemed its unanimated mouth had called me and those eyes, what caused them to look at me so strangely? "It's a mere whim," I thought, and dropped the veil and went back to the album again. Once more I looked at those two little duplicates and wondered who the lady was! "Oh no, they were not Mrs. Braxton's pictures," I mused, "the year written on their rim, '1905' had only passed two years! No, she was haggard, and oh, so pallid, while those pictures' original looked full of life and happiness! That merry twinkle around the eyes was not sad-faced Mrs. Braxton's." I put the pictures down, but quickly picked them up again. I scrutinized them more closely and then I held my hand to my forehead absorbed in deep thoughts. It could not be! Yet there was no doubt! I had seen the very same picture before! Where? Good God, I now remembered, it was the day when I saw poor Billy Brown kiss that picture in the small locket he so carefully guarded.



It could not be! Yet there was no doubt! I had seen the very same picture before!

The sun's rays were playing upon the water-pitcher, I happened to look in its direction and saw beyond through the pitcher the distorted, magnified picture of "Master Buford" in his tennis-suit. It looked so odd, all distorted out of shape by the play of the rays. I looked and laughed—but what was that, which up to now I had merely taken for a blurred spot-fault in the film? I looked at the many times enlarged bared arm, and I distinctly saw what hitherto age, and years of hardships, digging at their roots had not permitted my naked eyes to discern—the same monogramed, entwined "B. B." that I had seen on Billy Brown's forearm in the squire's court-room. What more proof than these were required? Wealthy Mrs. Harold Braxton and Billy Brown, the Hobo Kid, were beyond mistake mother and son!

I now knew all—I, alone in all the world held the key to their secret—but what would my knowledge as to Buford's whereabouts benefit the Braxtons. What would it help, but merely open for far worse results, heart-wounds merciful time had already commenced to heal? No doubt, they had searched with large rewards and other methods the world in vain for fourteen long months to find the missing boy. I knew the ways of runaway boys better than to try those antiquated schemes, as I had, when a boy, taken "five hundred mile jumps" traveling at night on top and underneath the passenger trains and during the daylight hours, sleeping in less apt to be molested box cars in running freight trains, to snatch a "hand-out" bite while waiting at some lonely siding for other trains to pass. "What could I do to repay my benefactors for their kindness?" Again and again these thoughts of gratitude passed through my active brain. I heard footfalls in the hall, the manor's folk were rising.

I sank back into the chair, but I could not find rest.

Aloud I repeated over and over the very words poor Mrs. Braxton used when in her mother's anguish, she so pitifully pleaded upon her knees before God, to protect and safely return to her, her only child.

I picked up her small picture and held it where the sun's rays fully strike it. "Great God! could it be possible? While I looked, it seemed my own dear old mother had come to me in Mrs. Braxton's features and now pleaded with her eyes, for me to atone for her twenty-nine years of hopeless waiting for the return of her own wandering boy, by rescuing another mother's wayward son."

Overcome, I sank upon my knees and made a solemn oath, that it would be I, the ex-convict Mrs. Braxton had befriended, who would find for her, her runaway boy, and then I kissed the little picture far more fervently than I had seen Billy Brown kiss its duplicate at the jail, and then I hid it carefully in my clothes.

At this moment someone knocked on the door and the butler, carrying a tray with my breakfast, entered and after he set same upon the library table, delivered the following message: "Marse Braxton begs to excuse his absence as Missus Braxton is so very ill, that a doctah is now in her room, and he wishes yo'all the best of fortune fo' yo future and good speed upon yo' journey."

After the butler had bowed himself out of the library, I ate a few hasty bites and then I left the grand manor, resolved to fulfill my solemn oath and to follow, to find and to return "Master Buford."

I quickly passed through the park, and as I shut its entrance gate, and while I took one last glance at the splendid surroundings of the grand manor, I remarked: "Merciful God, I never realized until now what pitiful wrecks runaway boys make out of their homes."

CHAPTER XII.

"The Trail of the Monicker."

IT was well after the dinner hour when I reached the railroad station, as I had made a wide detour around the town to avoid the staring eyes of its inhabitants, who by this time had become more than pleasantly acquainted with my countenance.

In an unobserved place I went over my finances and found that I still had forty dollars of the reward-money on hand. Three ten-dollar bills of this sum I sewed—tramp-fashion and handy in case of an emergency—into the ends of my necktie, making it a very valuable adornment.

Then I stretched in the shade of a tree to map out a tangible plan to follow Railroad Jack—for well I knew to discover him meant to find the boy, as on the road, more than any where else, the old saying: "Misery loves Company" is proven to be true, as shunned by everybody, a comrade is a very welcome partnership for a tramp, the more as each tramp is supposed to gather in his own "handouts" and then too, traveling in pairs, viewing the scenery in the summer and often almost freezing to death in the winter is far more pleasant in company.

Then to find Railroad Jack meant almost with certainty to solve my problem. But Jack and the Kid went to California, for that was what they planned to do upon their discharge—so all I had to do would be to follow them there, rake over the gold mines and camps and presto! in a few days I should have the Kid on his way back to his home!

But there was not one single chance in a thousand that Jack went to California, because it is a saying among

tramps, that old Adam told Eve this, as his first joke, because in the East it is the cowboy-ranches and the gold mines of California and in the West the orange groves and lemonade springs of Florida which is used by tramps as "common" bait to entice boys from their homes.

But where could I find this scoundrel amongst the 250,000 odd miles of railroads, which cover the United States like a gigantic net and upon each one of which he might at this moment be hoboing, walking or camping?

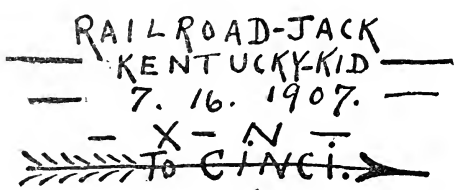
Perhaps, at least the ticket agent would remember the direction he went, so I approached the ticket window and in the most polite manner I inquired if the gentleman remembered a dark-haired man and a light-haired boy having purchased tickets from him two months ago, and—down came the shutter with a crash, but not too quickly for him to sneer through the closing opening: "I only talk business with ex-convicts." Jack, after all, did not tell an untruth when he warned the boy against the "Cain's Mark" that those striped suits left behind them.

But what next could I do? Perhaps Jack had left behind him his "monicker," the "name-de-road" left behind by every tramp signed, painted or carved upon the stations, out-houses and water-tanks, after he is through viewing the scenery, just as an artist places his signature in the corner of a finished picture.

Carefully I scanned the outside walls of the station; then I crossed the tracks, to look the freight house over; then I inspected the sheds and out-houses and finally the water-tank, and altho I saw many another tramp's monicker I did not find one left by Jack. I walked back to the station, from which the now thoroughly suspicious agent had followed with his malevolent eyes my every move.

Just then I heard a north-bound freight train whistle in the distance. "Wanderlust" was speaking as plainly as

ever: "Better get out of this than take chances with another term in the chain-gang. They may not want you now after they got your labor, but who can tell, your skin is worth twenty-two dollars hard cash to them and groceries cost money." This time sensible it spoke and I heeded its advice. I slipped into the waiting room, and while I pulled on my overalls, I looked at a Great Northern Railway map hanging upon the wall and wondered how that enterprising railroad sent its literature so far, but while I was scanning its lines spread all over the North-West my eyes fell upon some pencil scribbling on its margin. I stepped closer and lo! it read:



Jack had left his "name-de-road", his "monicker," behind him, which plainly told me that "Jack and the Kid on July 16th, had walked (X) North (N) towards Cincinnati.

The freight train stopped at the station to take on water. When it pulled out, I let it get good headway and then made a quick swing upon the long "gunnels" (truss-rods) under a box car and waving my hand at the same officer, who had arrested me just two months ago, and who came running at full speed towards the station bent upon pinching me a second time, I left the "town of troubles" behind me bound for Cincinnati.

Arriving there I was lucky to find upon a water-tank at the edge of the railroad yards where I had "unloaded" to keep out of the hands of the slick "Louisville and Nash-

ville" detectives, Jack's monicker, which told me that Jack left there on the 18th of July for St. Louis, Mo., via the "Baltimore and Ohio." Evidently Jack was not much of a traveler for it took him two days to "make" this far.

Next morning at daybreak I climbed out from under the observation car of the "Royal Blue Limited" the crack flyer of the "B. & O." at the East St. Louis station, 340 miles from my "loading" place, and when I walked across the famous Eads Bridge into St. Louis I found painted in large black characters upon a coping of the bridge, Jack's monicker. It told me this story: Railroad Jack was bound North to St. Paul—the gold mines of California had been switched to the harvest fields of the North-West—and I followed.

Jack must have taken haste slowly for I found his monicker scattered all along the route north, I even picked up information from several of the "profesh," that he had stopped "by the way," and had been seen camping with "Jungle Buzzards," the lowest class of tramps.

One evening late, after having been "fired off" a train at a lone siding and been forced to walk to a near-by water-tank to catch another ride, passing in the darkness where the tracks crossed over a high embankment, I could see down below me, around a brightly burning camp-fire, a camp of "Jungle-Buzzards." There were three frayed and mangy adult specimens of these sodden outcasts holding hand by hand, one between each, three young boys, all dancing around the fire, howling like fiendish Indians upon the warpath, while quart bottles of diluted, deathly alcohol were scattered about the camp. It does not take a prophet to forecast the finish of those three "runaways"—for no human mother would voluntarily hand her child over to those "jungle-buzzards" to be taught to become vagrants and addicted to the terrible alcohol-habit and marked for cer-

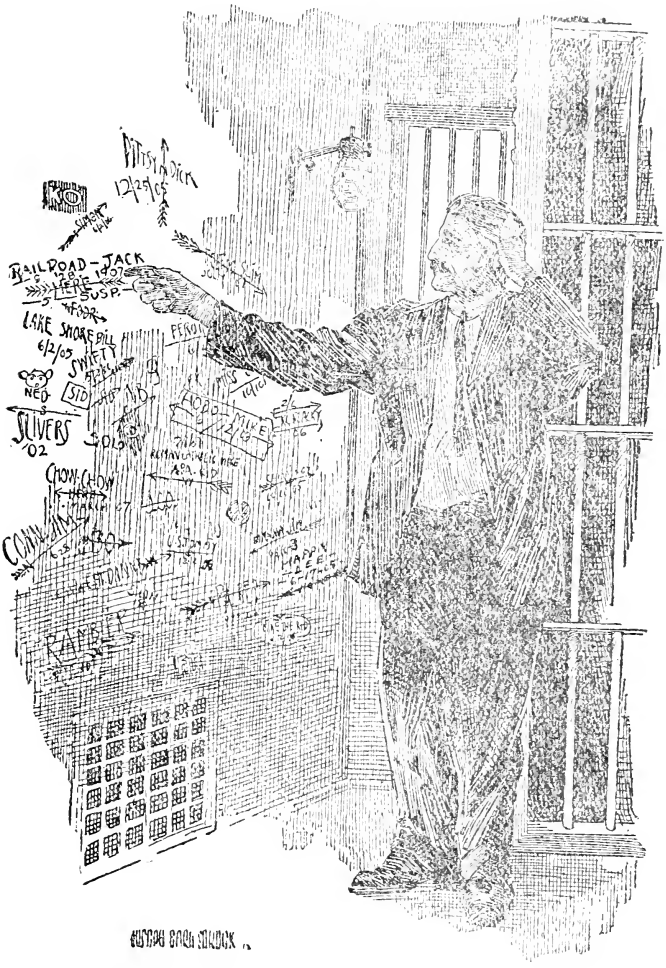
tain perdition—as it will be merely a matter of easily computed months before the fiery fluid will have corroded the lining out of their stomachs and pull them, after an indescribable agony, into an early grave, if not a delirium of the worst class ere this accomplishes this end.

When I slunk back into the darkness of the night and left this savage orgy behind me, I shuddered when I thought of what the mother of each of these boys would have to say, could she have witnessed this one of only too many dark sides of the road, which her restless boy never dreamed of when he left his best friend and home behind him to see the world by the "box car route."

Three days more and I reached the city of St. Paul, the "Key-City of the North-West." There I lost all track of Jack's monicker. I looked in every cranny and corner of St. Paul as well as the neighboring city of Minneapolis, for his registered "name-de-road" so I could read in what direction he had left the city, but all in vain.

I carefully, altho fruitlessly, scanned the walls of the Salvation Army's and other lodging houses, where "drifters," for a dime "roost" for the night. By every means known to the "profesh" I tried to get in touch with his whereabouts, but it actually seemed Jack had been swallowed by the earth, leaving not a trace.

One day, after I had already wasted two full weeks in vain efforts, I met on the streets of St. Paul, old "Alaska Slim," whose name had been derived from a trip to the Arctic North on a whaling ship, long before the Klondyke was ever thought of. I inquired of him if he had heard of Railroad Jack, or seen his monicker somewhere. He rubbed his head, then said: "A No. 1, I know I have seen Jack's monicker some place! Seen it only recently! Let me see! Oh, yes, I remember now! It's on the wall of the city



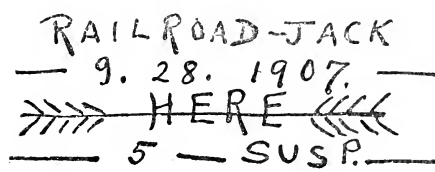
And I found among the many monickers left by tramp prisoners, Jack's "name-de-road".

jail where I saw it. They had me cooped for two days for begging upon the streets—you know a fellow gets hungry once in a while. Sure, that's where I saw it! He's registered on the white-washed walls in St. Paul's city jail."

I tried my best to make him repeat to me the date and the direction written below the monicker, but "Alaska Slim's" memory was not as sharp as when he first hit the road, as he could not recall it. To make doubly sure he was not mistaken having seen it there, I acted as if I doubted his words, which made him so angry that he left me standing in the street.

So, there it was! Behind the steel bars of St. Paul's city-calaboose! Safe out of my reach and I helpless on the outside with a dozen trunk-line railroad systems branching like a steel net in every direction of the compass. To read that monicker meant a quick solution of the riddle that I had thus far been unable to solve—in which direction Jack left St. Paul.

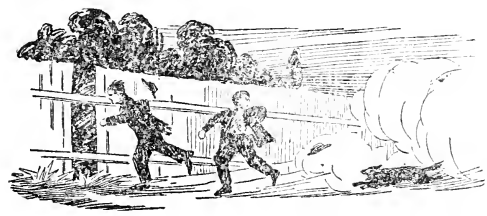
But where there is a will, is a way! A moment later playing "possum drunk," I reeled so hard against a blue-coat, who was standing against a lamp-post at the corner, idly fanning with his mace flies off his brass badge, that I sent the cop spinning into the street. He picked himself up and grabbed me by my coat collar, demanding at the same time to know if the sidewalk was not wide enough for me? I, acting maudlin, handed this to him: "Ah, go 'way! (hic) Chase yourself! (hic) I don't like blue lobsters!" (hic)—and within five minutes I had, what I was wishing for—a swift ride in a police patrol. A few moments later, charged with disturbing a policeman's peace, I was locked up in the city-calaboose, and soon I found among the many monickers, left by tramp prisoners, Jack's "name-de-road". It read:



which told this story:

"Railroad Jack was held here on Sept. 28th, five days for further investigation upon a charge of being a suspicious character."

He had been a prisoner in the jail alone, or otherwise he would have certainly registered the boy's name-de-road below his own, and the moment I missed the Kid's sign, I realized that Jack and the Kid had parted company, and that, altho I had found here the end of the trail Railroad Jack's monickers had left for me to follow him thus far, I had now completely lost all track of the Kentucky Kid.



CHAPTER XIII

"The Path of Blasted Hopes."

FIVE days was the sentence the police-judge imposed upon me for butting the guardian of St. Paul's peace into the street, and when the morning of my discharge came around, I, with twenty others, whose time had expired, after we had been lectured to get out of the city with the least possible waste of time, unless we wished to enjoy another term on the meager "bread and water" diet, made haste to comply with this admonition, as there is no other method so efficient to rid a community of its drunkards, "jungle-buzzards" and other undesirable citizens, and at that, at the least expense to the taxpayers, than a few days of enforced rest upon reduced fare.

During those five days I had carefully sifted every known method to again find a trace of the Kentucky Kid and had finally decided to follow the "spider-web" plan, which is carried out by circling in ever increasing distances about the last place a tramp's monicker had been seen, until one of a more recent date is found, which is then followed.

A street car not only took me beyond St. Paul's "hunger" limits, but also beyond those of the adjoining city of Minneapolis and four miles farther to Northtown Junction, where all westbound trains of the Northern Pacific Railroad stop to receive orders.

Here I met another westbound tramp. It was old "California Dan" who, altho he had been chased by the "Wanderlust" criss-cross the Union for almost forty years, had escaped as if by a miracle the usual fate beneath the wheels. He was headed for the Pacific North-West,

hence he would drift, to pass the winter, to the Mecca of of all ramblers—Southern California.

We climbed upon some railroad ties which were stacked alongside the road and we were soon busy, while waiting for a westbound train, exchanging the latest gossip of the road. We had hardly commenced interchanging road news, when we were "spotted" and arrested by one of those ever-watchful Northern Pacific R. R. detectives. He made us hold up our hands and then "frisked " our pockets for concealed weapons. We explained to him that we were "laborers" bound for the Dakotas to help the farmers gather their ripening crops. This excuse kept us out of jail, as he gave us the chance to "beat it" off the railroad company's property.

Over the right-of-way fence we went and out upon the public road until we had ample space between ourselves and the sleuth, then we returned to the railroad track, to do what every tramp does, when they are chased out of a town: walk to the nearest water station, where trains stop to fill their tenders.

We followed the path, which can be seen when standing upon the rear platform of any passenger train, now to the right, now to the left, now flush with the tie-ends and then again climbing down the embankments or up the steep cuts, but ever paralleling every one of the two hundred and fifty thousand miles of railroad track covering the United States.

The railroads have not built this path, altho it parallels upon their property across the parched deserts, through fertile valleys and over snow-clad, rock-ribbed mountain ranges, the steel-railed lines they have built. In fact, no railroad man ever uses this path, as the only pedestrian among railroad employees is the track walker who inspects the track, walking between the rails, upon the ties.

Indeed, the railroad companies only too often drive

stakes and place other obstructions to spoil the passage, and when ballasting the road bed, tons of coarse material are dumped upon its length, but altho obliterated, it is merely a matter of a few days before a thin line across or around the obstruction shows where a new path is in course of formation, and within a few weeks a smoothly worn path is again in evidence.

While Dan and I trudged along this path, freight trains laden with hoboing harvesters, some of whom were going west to search for employment; others with the earnings of many long-houred days laboring in the dusty harvest fields, were returning to add their share of turning the "Twin Cities" nights into days, but all of them as they passed, had only derisive shouts for us wanderers.

They did not know, those especially who yelled the loudest, the fellows with the starched shirts, who held cigarettes between their teeth, that they too must soon follow the path if they did not beware.

For not the railroads with steel picks and shovels have shaped those quarter of a million miles, but the feet of the "Old-Timer" tramps have cleared its length. Too feeble to swing and hold themselves upon the lurching trains, unable to resist the call of the road, homeless, friendless and penniless, wrecks of the years and of exposure, they now drag their bodies from place to place, one "Old-Timer" following the other from early dawn until the stars twinkle overhead, shaping with the footprints of their weary feet, this endless, narrow path.

This path is known amongst the tramps as the "Path of Blasted Hopes," and it is the "Old-Timer" silent, yet ever present warning to those who might undertake to follow their footsteps.

"Dan," I almost shouted—he was walking ahead—as I felt a shivering cold violently shaking me, when my

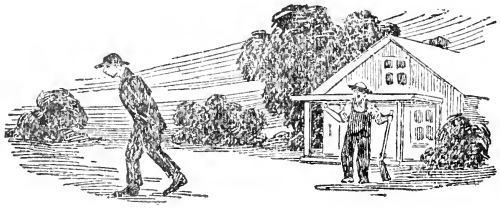
Hoboes, passing upon freight trains, had only derisive shouts for us wanderers.

thoughts came to the pitiful finish of all tramps—the Potter's Field, and I looked at the path beneath my feet, "I wonder if those harvesters think that you and I are already too old to ride the cars?"

"A No. 1," replied Dan, without answering my question, but showing what thoughts were crossing his mind, "have you heard that old 'Omaha Bill', you know the 'Old-Timer,' who back in the sixties beat the first train the Union Pacific sent west across the plains, has found his end? "A freight train 'side-swiped' him four miles west of Fargo, sitting upon the end of a tie, having fallen asleep while taking a rest. In the cars, under the cars, even upon this 'Path of Blasted Hopes,' this cursed 'Wanderlust' collects its uncanny dues from our ranks."

He stopped a moment in the journey, turned and when I gave him an affirmative nod, his eyes had a peculiar look. I understood, he was an "Old-Timer" himself and now day after day, while adding mile upon mile to his final record, he rued the very hour he started on the road.

Then he again plodded ahead upon the "Path of Blasted Hopes" and ere long I heard Dan faintly whistle the refrain of "Home, sweet Home."



CHAPTER XIV

"The Vampires of the Road."

WHEN we reached, after a weary twenty-seven mile walk, the water station at Elk River, the full moon was rising on the cloudless firmament, casting her fairy, silvery white light over the silent landscape.

Luck was with us, for only a few minutes after our arrival at the water tank we heard the whistle of a west-bound train, which proved, as it pulled up to fill its tender, to be a long freight train made up of empty stock cars.

Hidden from their view behind some sheds which stood close to the track, we watched the train's crew look for "hot boxes" under and for hoboes inside the empty cattle cars, as ready to cool the ones, as to bounce the others.

Soon the engineer gave the starting signal, then with many jerks and unearthly noises, slowly the heavy train commenced to move away.

"Come on, A No. 1," Dan shouted, when he noted that the train men were not watching, and we dashed across the tracks and swung ourselves into the open door of an empty stock car. The moment we entered we stretched ourselves flat upon its floor, so as to be out of view of any member of the train crew who might still be standing on the right-of-way. We were not discovered, and as we passed beyond the last switches of the station we arose to take a survey of the car.

We found we were the only occupants of this car, but in the one ahead of us we counted more than a dozen fellows, who too, had lain flat upon the floor, but now were

walking about. They were "harvesters" bound for the wheatfields of the North-West.

The train made "good time," as we stopped only at water tanks and Junction points.

The night wore on and gradually weariness got the best of us, and altho the windstorm, swept through the open cars by the speed of the train, made this a difficult feat, we soon failed to rise—we had dozed away.

Mile after mile we were adding to our records, when we were aroused from our slumbers by loud commands, emanating from the adjoining car.

Dan, who was a lighter sleeper than I, put his arm across my body and while he held me tight to the floor, whispered with bated breath into my ear: "The Vampires."

This was all he said, but it was all I needed, to be suddenly roused to full wakefulness, and I even shuddered before I could squeeze Dan's hand in recognition of our mutual peril.

[As human vultures follow armies into battles to rob the unprotected slain left upon the battlefields; as incarnate fiends pillage the dead whenever a catastrophe destroys human lives; as ghouls at midnight in an isolated cemetery despoil the graves of their gruesome contents, so the "Vampires" of the Road rob tramps of spoils so pitifully small considering that a hobo has not even at night a place to rest, that human vultures, incarnate fiends and even the ghouls of the grave yards are gentlemen if compared with these cowardly, absolutely heartless "vampires," who are the transition of the "Jungle Buzzard" into "yeggmen." These vampires travel in gangs. As many as a dozen of these black-shirted, slouch-hatted scoundrels can be found camping in the woods together, too lazy to beg their food, too cowardly for cleaner exploits,

These black-shirted, slouch-hatted scoundrels camp during the daylight hours in the woods, to sally forth as "Vampires of the Road" during the night.

they sleep during the daylight hours to sally forth at night with their ever-ready revolvers. Some of these vampire-gangs have attained national attention by their revoltingly inhumane ferocity.

The "Lake Shore Gang" less than half a dozen years ago, completely terrorized the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway. It was not thought anything unusual when weekly from one to ten murdered victims of these scoundrels were found stretched out in death beside the railroad track, some of them denuded even of the last stitch of their clothing. They became so emboldened that "pay day" on this system meant from one to two dozen employees losing their earnings—if not their limbs and lives, to this gang, every cent of it to be promptly converted into alcoholic drink.

The railroad company organized a detective service to cope with these scoundrels and within a few months after commencing operations they had every one behind the bars for life-terms or upon the gallows, while their leader "Erie Slim", committed suicide, when at bay in a barn surrounded by these officers.

The "Trenton Gang" operating over the Pennsylvania Railroad between Trenton, N. J., and Pittsburgh, Pa., less than a decade ago, murdered hundreds of harmless tresspassers. They too, were sent to the gallows by that railroad company's special service.

Only recently, near Reno, Nevada, a brakeman, a deputy sheriff and a squire received life terms for playing "vampires" on the Southern Pacific Railway. There are at present several other vampire-gangs operating in different sections of the Union.]

No wonder then, that Dan and I sat as quiet as mice for whom a hungry cat is waiting, straining our eyes to see

as much of the "hold up" as the moonlit night would permit in the semi-darkness of the adjoining car.

We counted four masked vampires, who no doubt had swung themselves from the roof into the open door of the car. They had with the aid of their threatening revolvers lined the harvesters up, and now were busily engaged, amidst fearful curses and threats, emptying the pockets of their victims, who with their hands above their heads were completely at their mercy.

These vampires must have been desperate fellows to hold up laborers going to the harvest-fields, as only returning laborers could be apt to carry sums of money, but the constant "toting of their ever-ready revolvers—the same reason that causes nearly every murder—makes them callous against the consequences that they know will be theirs if they are caught. They, as well as the yeggmen, are merely the outgrowth of a foolish notion to sentence gun-carrying tramps, who always have a plausible excuse ready, to only a few days in jail or assess against them only a nominal fine.

"Hey, there," we heard a rough command in the other car, "take off them shoes, I reckon they will fit me." The fellow so addressed must have refused to comply with the vampire's orders, for the next thing we heard was a storm of bullets fired from their revolvers whistling over our heads. Then a few sudden shrieks; then some groaning; then all quietness and last a gruff voice ordering with curses the other harvesters to "pick up and throw" something out of the open door of the cattle car. Then all was silence, only interrupted now and then by the threats of the vampires as they continued searching through the other fellows' pockets.

We were now climbing a steep grade and as the train commenced to slacken speed, Dan whispered into my ear:

"Here is our chance! Let's jump before they get to us." We crawled to the open door, and altho the train was still running at a dangerous rate, we made a headlong dive out of the car, which sent us sprawling down the embankment.

When the train had passed us, we climbed back upon the track and we congratulated ourselves escaping the clutches of the vampires. Then Dan remarked: "Say, A No. 1, do you know what they pitched off the train?" I knew, but replied: "May be it's the loot." "Oh, no," he replied, "it's not loot. Let's go back and see, I have been in 'vampire' stick-ups before."

Silently we walked back, carefully scanning the right-of-way. Soon we heard weak calls for asssistance, then loud moanings and presently we stood by the side of the almost lifeless form of a poor fellow, whose face had been pounded beyond recognition, while his clothes were completely saturated by his life's blood, which spurted from several bullet wounds, while his shoes were missing from his feet—the vampires had added one more tramp-victim to their list.

We made the poor fellow as comfortable as possible. Then Dan climbed over the right-of-way fence and ran for assistance to a farmhouse. In a few minutes a lighted lamp coming across the fields showed that his mission had been successful.

When the farmer arrived we carried the now unconscious fellow to the farm house where we laid him upon the lawn. We tried our best to get his name and address from him, but he was too far gone and merely mumbled incoherent words, but now and then he would loudly exclaim: "Mother!"

This farm house had no telephone connections, but of what value would it have been to call the authorities? At the next grade or stop the vampires would have left

the train and the railroad; would have hidden their masks, revolvers and loot and the next day a few harmless looking, black-shirted fellows, camping out in the woods around a hobo-camp-fire would have been all that posses, searching for the vampires would have found.

None of the harvesters or tramps who had been held up could be induced to appear in court against them, because this would have meant a long stay in the same jail and perhaps even to be locked in the same cell with these murderous scoundrels until the day of the trial arrived. So they were comparatively safe to murder as they pleased, while the newspapers almost daily chronicled the fact, that one or more unknown tramps "fell out" of a moving train and were horribly mutilated by a "cruel" railroad company.

When daylight permitted this, we carefully searched the clothes of the poor fellow, who was only a youth of about eighteen, but failed to find the least scrap that would reveal his identity.

After the coroner, who had been notified, viewed the corpse, we placed it into a roughly made pine board box and buried him in a shallow grave in the corner of a field.

Not a word was spoken, nor a prayer mumbled during this burial of another unknown tramp, but, I, who had not yet forgotten the faint calls for his mother, I thought of this poor mother who from this hour on would be longing, waiting and watching in vain for just one more sign of life from her missing boy, whom the "Wanderlust" had snatched from her side and henceforth every tramp who knocks on her door will hear her pitiful plea, a plea a tramp hears only too often, the very same plea every tramp's mother repeats until her own grave is dug and which is: "Oh, have you not seen somewhere, my missing boy?"

CHAPTER XV

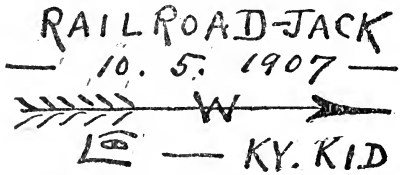
"In Wreck and Hospital."

SOON after we had consigned the poor fellow to his last resting place, Dan and I walked back to the hill, where we had the good fortune to swing ourselves into an empty box car of a heavy freight train which barely crawled up the steep grade and rode unmolested into St. Cloud, where another one of those pesky detectives started to climb into one of the open doors of our car, giving us just a bare chance to dive post-haste out of the other one, to beat a hasty "get-away" beyond the railroad property.

When again we found our breath, old Dan sourly remarked: "A No. 1, the road is by far not what it used to be! In my time a 'bo' could ramble from New York to San Francisco and not even meet an officer, but nowadays, by reason of the work done by vampires and yeggs, it's being grabbed by one detective after another; into one jail and out again into the next one. It's certainly a problem for a 'bo' to make his way upon the railroads." I agreed with him, for certainly the road is not now what it used to be in the past.

We kept shy for some hours and then, when we felt that the officer should have moved to a different quarter, we strolled into the station's waiting-room to inquire what time the next train would be due to leave for the West.

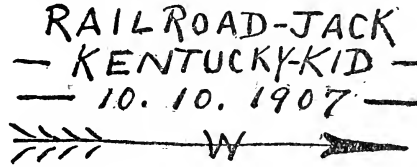
While Dan spoke to the agent, I espied upon the casing of the ticket window this penciled monicker:



which sign read that Jack had been here on the fifth of

October and was rambling west looking for the Kentucky Kid, and this sign told me too, that the boy had now two tramps searching for him, one who intended to spoil his future, while the other one was anxious to save him from the road.

Three days later, 600 miles farther west, I found his monicker at Glendive, Montana, it read:



and proclaimed to me that Jack had "doubled up" once more with the boy. I surmised that the lad had made an appointment with Jack to meet him here. I felt sorry for the boy, for I thought that he had become so ensnared with Jack's tales of the "Golden West" that he now would not voluntarily leave this scoundrel, as those five days Jack had spent in jail should have given the Kid every opportunity to escape his clutches.

When I reached Helena, the beautiful capital city of the State of Montana, I was three days behind them, at Drummond only two and when I reached Easton, Washington, their monicker was dated the day of my arrival there, and a railroad man told me that I had just missed them by an hour, as they left on the last freight train preceding the one I took, hidden in an empty, but closed box car, as at Easton is the eastern portal of the several miles long tunnel, which dives under the Cascade Mountains and through which no sane hobo could afford to take chances of suffocating while passing through its length, hanging on the outside of a train.

While I passed through the smoky hole, I chuckled aloud in the darkness of the car, as I thought that I would certainly find the boy at Seattle, just ninety miles beyond

the tunnel, after I had followed him by means of Jack's monicker across the continent.

Just after we left the tunnel the train stopped for some warning signal and I could plainly hear footfalls on the outside of the car. I thought they were those of a brakeman chasing tramps, but presently I heard the squeaking of the door of the car ahead, and looking through a crack, I caught a fleeting glimpse of some hoboes climbing into this car, closing the door after them.

Presently the train pulled away and while the car lurched, bounced and rattled, I rolled my coat up for a pillow and was soon sound asleep.

But what was that? I felt myself bouncing high up into the air, to be violently thrown back and forth as if I were a mere rubber ball; the crashing, horrible jumping of the heavy trucks below me, told me—I had been in many wrecks before—that the car had jumped the track. There was not a moment to waste! I made a jump and grabbed the thin steel rods which hold the sides of the car rigidly together, and there I hung betwixt top and bottom with death grinning at me out of every corner. Now splinters began to fly about, the car could not stand the strain much longer, then—all was blackness.

When I awakened, as if from a long sleep, I gazed about me, then closed my eyes once more, I did not wish to see anything just then. I opened my eyes again, when I felt a soft hand stroke my burning forehead and heard a kindly voice remark: "Poor fellow, he has a high fever." I drowsily opened my eyes and recognized the sober raiments of a Sister of Mercy, then I dropped off once more to sleep. The electric lights were burning when I again awakened. I tried to turn my aching head, I could not do it, but I felt that it was all bandaged up, then I tried to move my arms and hands, but they too were tightly bandaged. I

"Poor fellow," I mused, "I wonder what accident sent him to this hospital to keep me company?"

glanced about me and knew that I was in the surgical ward of some hospital, then remembered the wreck and once more dropped off to sleep. Later I was awakened and medicine was given me, I asked the kindly faced Sister who watched over me as if I were her own brother instead of a strange, homeless tramp, how badly I was hurt. "Hush, child, do not talk, you will be all right again in a few days," she assured me. I went to sleep again.

When I awakened, I felt the fever had left and I was far better, but for those bandaged limbs. I turned my head a little to see who the poor fellow was who upon the next cot was constantly repeating: "Oh! What will my poor mother say when they bring me home like this?" I noted that the other patient's head was all swathed up in snow-white bandages, all but his nose and his mouth. "Poor fellow," I mused, "I wonder what accident sent him here to keep me company?"

The next morning I had so much improved that the Sister of Mercy, one of whom was constantly watching my every move and did my every bidding, spoke to me of home and friends. Tears welled into my eyes, it seemed too odd to hear a human being speak kindly to me—a castaway. I asked her what had brought me to their hospital, and she told me that the freight train I was hoboing upon had broken in two and dashing at fearful speed down the steep mountain grade had jumped the rails and piled the cars house-high in a deep ravine. Then I inquired if some others had been injured or even lost their lives in the wreck. "That boy upon the next cot and you," she answered, pointing at the poor fellow writhing with pain upon the adjacent cot, "were the only two injured. Thank God," she added after a pause, and after she gave vent to a deep sigh, "this was one wreck that brought no killed ones to the morgue."

This bit of news aroused my interest for my neighbor. We were hurt in the same wreck, were immured in the same

hospital and logically should become friends in misery. He was still unconscious but for those oft-repeated calls for his mother. All his other words were mere incoherent babblings of a fever-scourged intellect.

On the third day I had so much improved that the doctors removed my bandages and found after a thorough examination that I had not sustained fractures, but that I was merely badly bruised from head to heels.

I inquired of a Sister what might be the name of the other fellow, and she told me, altho his clothes were carefully searched, outside of the usual contents, not a scrap was found, that would disclose his identity, but that his hat had been purchased in Cincinnati.

He improved so rapidly that during the afternoon I heard him speak to the doctor. When the doctor left him, longing for a converstaion to pass the long hours, I addressed him: "Hey, Bo, how do you like Cincinnati's Fountain Square? Nice benches they have there for tired hoboes to bunk upon during the balmy summer nights! Hey?" This chat seemed to interest him for he whispered: "Wish I was there now. I would be quickly home with mother!" Then he sank back into silence, from which my further efforts could not rouse him.

A few days later and I had progressed so far that I was permitted to stroll about the ward. For want of something more entertaining, I watched the doctors dress the other patients' injuries. They came to my neighbor, who in all his bandages looked more like an Egyptian mummy than a human being. They slowly peeled his bandages from off his head. I shivered as I thought that if some other boys could see these pitiful sights they would not be so ready to run away from their homes. Now they picked the absorbent cotton, sticking to the bruised, swollen countenance, while the doctor, to allay the pains this

occasioned, remarked: "Say, boy, you're a lucky one, it's a wonder that you did not get it just a wee bit worse—you would then not have been in this hospital." I now watched them how they carefully washed his features, I looked closer and recognized — Buford Braxton.

Could it be he? I looked again so I could not be mistaken. It was he, but he was now too sick to withstand excitement. Day after day I sat by his bedside. He did not recognize me because my hair and mustache had been removed by the surgeons, and too, Kentucky is so far away from Seattle.

I watched over him so tenderly that even the Sisters of Mercy commended me for my zeal—they did not know that I was wishing for him to get as quickly well as possible so I could bring him back to his mother.

Gradually, as he improved, we struck up a firm friendship and with my mission ever in view, I commenced to speak about my home and mother, and how I yearned to be again amongst friends. One day he whispered, after he had me place my ear almost against his mouth: "I wish I, too, were home!" This confession gave me an opening wedge, and I continued to keep on in the same vein so as to cause him to overcome the "Wanderlust," and the ill-advice Jack had given him, by making him homesick.

A few days later he had so far improved that the doctors took off his bandages and permitted him to sit up on his cot. For the first time since the wreck he smiled, and when the doctors had left us alone, he placed his hand upon mine, as it was resting upon the edge of his cot and pressed it. "Friend," he slowly said, "I feel better to-day, and want to thank you for what you have done for me. You have proven yourself a 'friend in need'!" Then he sank back upon his pillow with his head turned away. I knew what were his thoughts—how now, in extreme trouble he

felt so lonely and forsaken, just as every tramp did, especially when the time comes that he realized that he had wasted the best years of his life hearkening to the "Wanderlust's" call to the road.

During the afternoon he again sat, propped up by the pillows on his cot, and as he felt so much better and too, his talk was more animated than ever before, I thought the opportune time had arrived to reveal to him my identity. "Do you recognize my face?" I asked. He stared into my face, his mind was yet too muddled to recall ever having seen me, and I added: "Do you remember Railroad Jack?" This question revived his memory, and with widely opened eyes he searched my features. "Do you know Railroad Jack?" in complete amazement he parried my question. "You bet," I hastily replied, "and do you remember Bill Brown, the Kentucky Kid?" I continued my questioning and again he looked at me in blank astonishment.

I rose and stepped away from his cot, then turned around so he could see my face all the better and now an almost deathly pallor, far paler than the wreck and pains had left it, spread over his haggard face and he beckoned me to come closer. "You are A No. 1, the tramp," he said slowly, "have you come here to tell the good Sisters that I am an ex-convict?" and heavy tears commenced to trickle down his cheeks. "No, no, Billy," I replied and stroked his trembling forehead, "I am your friend," and then I made him lie down and cease talking until later.

After supper had been served he beckoned me to his side and asked if I heard anything concerning Railroad Jack. I explained to him how the Sisters and the doctors had told me that no one besides we two had been injured or killed in the wreck. "A No. 1," he quietly observed, "Railroad Jack, like almost all the others of his kind, did not prove himself a 'friend in need'. "

CHAPTER XVI.

"What the Tramp did to the Boy."

THE following day, Billy assisted by his youthful vitality, had rallied so far that the doctor permitted me to push him, seated in a rolling chair about the ward. When undisturbed by any listeners, I, anxious to find out how Billy fared since leaving the jail with Jack, casually remarked: "Kid, tell me how did Jack manage to get himself arrested in St. Paul and spend five days in the city jail?" I could tell by the astonished expression appearing in his countenance that he tried to fathom how I came to know this secret and when I followed this first question up by telling him that Jack and he had walked out of the Kentucky town northbound upon the railroad track; had used two days to reach Cincinnati and over two months to land at St. Paul; how they had parted company to meet again at or near Glendive, he gaped at me almost stunned by surprise at the apparently superhuman revelations I made—he was not yet "monicker-wise" as we tramps call it.

"Well, A No. 1," the Kid said, after he had caught a second breath, "seeing that you know everything, just as if you had accompanied us on our journey, I may as well make a clean breast of all that happened since I met you last."

"When we reached St. Louis, Railroad Jack proposed that we first ramble to the northwestern harvest fields, to make a "stake" that would insure us against starvation when crossing the deserts and the snow-clad mountain ranges, which lay between us and California. He, being the leader, and also knowing the country better, I assented and we rambled to St. Paul. On the way up he made me

"I do not mind helping a sober working man, but never a drunken loafer!"

beg his food. He told me that every 'tramp kid' had to do this for his partner and atho my Kentucky blood rebelled against it, I provided him with the food I begged from house to house. Don't blame me, A No. 1," he interrupted his narrative when he noted a half disgusted expression flitting across my countenance, "a kid away from home in the hands of a grown tramp is like putty in the hands of a painter. He can do, and does, anything he pleases with a lad who has the misfortune to fall into his filthy clutches."

Then he continued his original story: "Long before we reached St. Paul, his money had given out, and altho we both were offered time and again, good jobs at the highest wages, he would not allow us to accept one, always dangling the 'better' jobs in the harvest fields before my vision. After loafing from place to place, living off the trimmings of other peoples' tables and chicken-coops, we finally arrived at St. Paul."

"Here he never looked for a chance of employment, but when the food I begged for him, on account of close competition, made by the 'Kids' of other tramps, became insufficient to fill his lazy carcass, he proposed that I approach people upon the sidewalks and shamelessly ask for the price of 'meals and lodgings.' I absolutely refused to do this, the more as every cent, ever since the day I brought my first 'handout' to him was promptly converted into beer and alcohol. He shamefully maltreated me, because I positively refused to degrade myself as low as I have seen many other runaway boys do, who actually supported in idleness and alcohol, able-bodied, low-lived tramps."

"One day, when under the influence of strong drink, he changed his method. 'Come on, Kid,' he said, 'let me just show you how easy it is to pick up dollars upon the

streets of any city.' He placed me at the corner of a street; he walked a few steps and boldly accosted a benign-looking gentleman who had just stepped out of a restaurant. Actuated by the alcohol he had under his collar he made a loud demand for 'the price,' and the next thing I saw was the stranger pulling his closed fist out of his pocket and giving Jack such an awful blow beneath his jaw that it sent him sprawling into the gutter. Then the stranger grabbed Jack by the coat collar, after showing him a detective badge which was pinned upon his vest and declaring loudly: 'I don't mind helping a sober workingman, but never a drunken loafer!' He dragged him to the nearest police-box, where in a few minutes the police patrol carried Jack to jail and away from me."

"I did not know at first what would become of me. Here I was, a thousand miles from home, but I still remembered Jack's admonitions about being recognized by the other fellows, who had been in the jail with me, and I decided to make a bee-line for California."

"The second morning after leaving St. Paul, I arrived at Glendive, Montana. I was flat-broke and at the first house I knocked, offering to do work for a little lunch, the lady of the house told me where I could find a job dispensing soda water in a drugstore. I applied at the place and was accepted."

"It is not natural for a boy to voluntarily become a common beggar and I found now that I earned honestly my own keep that I was never more happy in all my life. Before I had worked the first hour, I resolved never in all my life to tramp again, but on the contrary, I promised myself to save something out of my earnings each week until I had accumulated enough to pay my fare back home."

Here he paused a moment and I took the occasion to ask him: "Say, kid, don't you wish you were home this

moment with your mother?" I looked him straight into his eyes while speaking, and a peculiar twitching of the muscles about his mouth told the story—he was becoming homesick, my efforts in the last few days, harping constantly how I, myself, would like to be back home, had effected this change in the boy, but I also knew that I could not afford to force the boy to return to his home, for fear that he would disappear from under my hands, making all my troubles vain —never in all his days to be again reformed. It was my aim to cause him to beg me to take him home, the only chance I had to get him safely back to Kentucky.

He proceeded with his story: "I attended so well to my work that the proprietor of the drugstore had only praises for me. When store-closing time arrived on Saturday night he handed me my pay-envelope. I opened it, counted the money and found he had made an error, giving me two dollars above my stipulated wage. I called my employer's attention to the mistake, but he merely patted me upon my shoulder and assured me that the two dollars were the reward of honestly attending to my work." "Believe me, A No. 1," here his voice rose high, "I was at that moment the happiest boy in the whole State of Montana. I bade him good-night and stepped through the door into the street."

"Somebody nudged me and I heard a familiar voice greet me: 'Hello, Billy Brown, how-do-you-do?' I turned and almost fell down upon the sidewalk, for it was Railroad Jack who spoke. Even before I could recover and say one single word, he hissed into my ear: 'Give me the price of a meal and a bed, Billy. I just landed here to-day. I have been hunting you all the way from St. Paul and I am glad I found you now.' I did not know then that he had seen me at work at the soda-fountain in the store, so I reached in my pocket and pulled out a dollar of my honestly

earned wages, which without a word, I handed him and then managed to slip away from him into the passing Saturday midnight throng. I was mortally certain that he would hunt for me through the railroad yards, as I knew by other tramps kids' experiences, who repeated this to me, that a boy is a valuable asset to any tramp, and if Jack did not find me there I was sure he would 'railroad' west to search for me, and thus I would be rid of him."

"The next day, Sunday, I had to work in the forenoon. When I arrived at the store it was not yet opened, but Railroad Jack was waiting in front of it and greeted me. 'Good morning, Billy Brown,' he hissed, 'give me the price of a breakfast.' I realized that I must save myself, now or never, out of the hands of this scoundrel, so I resolutely refused to assist him, giving as an excuse that I needed every cent of my earnings to pay my expenses. He grabbed me roughly by my wrist, and while twisting it so my ear was forced close to his mouth he hissed: 'Your boss will know this morning you are an ex-convict and that will be the last of you and your job.' Then he turned my wrist loose and without a blessed word being exchanged, I dropped a half dollar piece into his waiting outstretched palm."

"He himself had put the 'thumb-screws of shame' on me, he, who had warned me against the others! When dinner time rolled around he again was waiting for me and forced me to eat my dinner with him, I paying for both. I did not dare rebuff him for he had his hand upon my throat. 'I will tell your boss' as he constantly repeated."

"Sunday evening and Monday morning he did not appear, and I commenced to breathe more freely. But I was not yet 'wise' to the ways of the road, for at mid-day,

when from across the open street he beckoned me to come to him, I obeyed."

"I was sure now he would make his last 'blackmail' demand—that was what it amounted to—he wanted me. He ordered me, with a vile threat, to bring out my hat. I could not help myself, unless I wished to be additionally humiliated by the scoundrel revealing my secret to my employer, so I brought the hat and he forced me to accompany him to the railroad yards. Oh! how I prayed a detective would arrest us before it would be too late, but we were not molested and caught a westbound freight. I did not dare to demand assistance from any human being! I realized that I was an ex-convict and that the one-armed squire's and the deputy sheriff's greed to earn a fee had as completely wrecked my future as now this train wreck has almost finished my henceforth useless life."

This was his story and after a brief pause he continued: "What can I do, A No. 1, now? I am a penniless and sick boy far away from home — " "And mother," I finished his sentence and then, before the effect of my last words would be lost, I added quickly,: "Buford Braxton, your mother loves you just as much as ever, your darling mother is waiting with open arms for you this moment. She does not care if you are sick or well, poor or rich, a beggar's boy or a millionaire, but her heart is breaking for you to come back home to her."

"Buford Braxton," he muttered, and his fingers twitched while his eyes were cast straight to the floor. "Who, for God's sake, told you my name?" I did not answer his question, but I pulled out my memorandum book, picked out his mother's little picture and hid it within the palm of my hand. "Buford, your mother's heart is breaking," I said, and slowly I repeated to him all that had occurred since I found the bracelet, and I especially

strongly portrayed to him how "old Aunt Dinah" and all the other faithful darkies were yearning for his return, and repeated word for word how his poor mother had pleaded alone with God, in the midnight hour in the library, and then quickly placing Mrs. Braxton's small photograph upon his knees, I waited.

First he stared at it for a moment in complete silence, then he picked it up and kissed that little unanimated picture as I never saw before a mortal kiss one, and then I, with tears streaming down my face—so affected had I become—said solemnly: "Buford Braxton, don't you wish to make your darling mother once more happy? Don't you wish to save her from going into an early grave from a broken heart caused by her sorrowing for her wandering, wayward boy?" He seemed to waver, and I added: "Buford, don't you wish to return with me to her and tell her that you love her now, as much as you loved her the day you left your home and tell her that you do not wish to end your days an outcast, despised hobo, but instead will take your place again in the world as Buford Braxton of Braxton Manor?"

Hardly had I spoken the last syllable than he threw his arms around my neck and amid loud sobs begged me to bring him back to his mother. When he again became calm, I asked him to join me in a silent prayer to God for him to help us to reach Kentucky in safety, and while he, with closed eyes, murmured a fervid prayer, I thought of poor Mrs. Braxton and how the Almighty Creator had heard and answered her prayers.

CHAPTER XVII.

"There is no Place Like Home."

IT was the fifteenth of November, 1907, when we bade farewell to the good Sisters of Mercy, who had nursed us back to our health without demanding and receiving any other reward but our "thank you's" for their cares and troubles. I still had the three ten dollar bills which I had sewed into the ends of my necktie, but I knew that crossing the deserts in midwinter would demand a full supply of food, so did not dare to pay out a cent. I could have telegraphed Mr. Braxton to forward by wire a ticket to send Buford back to Kentucky, but only too often I recalled cases where returning runaway boys had lost their "nerve" when it came to again face their parents and beg of them forgiveness for their heartless pranks, and how many a time "Wanderlust" snatched these returning boys from the very threshold of their parents home to completely disappear from view, perhaps to end their days as "Jungle Buzzards."

At this season of the year all the mountain passes on the northern routes were closed to us by zero weather, and we had planned to strike out for San Francisco, and from there cross the continent over the more clement "Central Routes." While making inquiries among some of the "profesh," concerning different matters, such as the detectives, the jails, etc., etc., upon which every wise tramp must throughly post himself, I was told that at the timber wharf a schooner was taking on a cargo of lumber and was made ready to leave early the following morning for Los Angeles and that perhaps there would be a chance to work our passage.

"Here is our opportunity, Kid," I shouted to Buford, and almost dragged him off his feet down Yessler Way, the most beautiful street of Seattle, towards the water front, "let's get in on this deal in a hurry for it means not only quickly reaching the land of strawberries, oranges and ostriches, but wages on top of all, and besides this, Kid, it's just like rambling in the good old summertime, when you cross, even in the midst of winter, the continent by the more southern routes."

Within the shortest possible time we climbed aboard the sailing ship, and after we explained to the Captain our errand, he offered to "ship" me, but wouldn't hear a word about taking Buford, as he declared the lad to be too young to even earn his mere passage. So this chance went glimmering, and we left the schooner.

We stood upon the wharf watching the longshoremen loading the heavy timber into the vessel's hold, when Buford remarked: "Say, A No. 1, if we were rats we could hide in that hold and see a bit of the world, couldn't we?" "What's the matter," I replied, "playing 'rats' right now?" And with a "follow me" we sneaked into the hold, and in the darkest place we could find we hid ourselves away.

Before daylight they finished the loading, and presently we heard the play of the waves against the bow, as the tug boat towed us through scenic Puget Sound, into the Straits of San Juan and later, when we felt the seaway, we knew we were out upon the broad Pacific.

For two days we kept quiet, even while passing through heavy weather, judging by the way the schooner rolled and groaned, then, almost famished by thirst and scared out of our wits by the vessel's rats, whose squealing made our blood curdle, we pounded with a piece of broken scantling against the deck above us to attract the attention of the ship's crew. We must have pounded fully an hour before

we were heard, and when at last a hatch was opened, the captain was the first one to climb down the ladder and pounce upon us. We pleaded with him not to hurt us, but now came our surprise, for instead of licking the lives out of us, he was actually pleased to discover us, as during the storm the ship had sprung a bad leak and each additional "hand" to man the pumps meant another chance for all to be saved from worse trouble.

We had fair wind and passed the mouth of the Columbia River with all sails set and on the third day out left Cape Blanco behind us. But just off Eureka, California, we struck a terrible storm, which opened the already badly leaking seams of the schooner to such an extent that first inch by inch, then foot by foot, the water in the hold gained on our pumps, until the ship rode so deep in the trough of the sea, that mountain-high comber after comber dashed tons of swirling ocean water upon our decks, twisting off the masts, smashing our life boats and finally tore open the hatches, and but for the buoyancy of the heavy timber, which still held tight in the hold and kept us afloat, we would have been drowned as were all the rats aboard.

We drifted about in the completely dismantled wreck, and just as we heard the roaring of the breakers dashing against the rocky coast, a boat sent out from a life-saving station, which had observed our plight, boarded the derelict and brought us safely ashore.

We were sent to Eureka, one of the prettiest cities in the world, but not then reached by any railroad. Its noble citizens made up a purse and not only were we sent on the next mail boat to San Francisco, but all received a complete outfit of clothes.

We left San Francisco the 25th of November, and riding the rods, we rambled through the high passes of the Sierra Nevada amid a snow storm, and then, greatly hampered

Mountain-high comber after comber dashed tons of swirling ocean water upon our decks, twisting off the masts, smashing our life boats and finally tore open the hatches.

by wintery weather and the railroad detectives, the hobo's greatest enemies, we landed on the first of December at the grandest city of the Middle West—Kansas City, Mo.

Here we worked our passage upon a river steamboat to St. Louis, from where we traveled on a coal barge to Cairo, hence another steamboat brought us to the pretty city of Paducah, Ky., where we hoboed over the Illinios Central R. R. to Louisville and the Louisville and Nashville to Cincinnati, where we landed on the twenty-fourth of December, one day before Christmas.

Until here, Buford had been only too willing to return to his parents, but now, with only a few miles betwixt the road and his home, he became morose and every act bespoke plainly that he was losing the courage that had brought him all the way across the continent to beg forgiveness of his parents for his boyish excapade. I tried to have him write to his parents, pleading in advance for their pardon, but he refused to do so, intending to surprise them.

I had already purchased, with the last dollars of the reward money which I had received from Mrs. Braxton, two tickets for us, as we intended to reach—for more than one good reason—his home railroad station as first-class passengers.

We had several hours to wait until our train was due to leave, so we checked our overall bundles at the "Manhattan" restaurant, where we had dined, and set out to see the Christmas sights of Cincinnati. We entered a department store and in the crush of the Christmas crowd, the first thing I knew, Buford had vanished from sight. A strange strangulating feeling seized me, like a flash it came through my mind that, perhaps after all, my two months of hardships and dangers would be in vain, if I did not watch

out, and I dashed out of the store and raced back to the "Manhattan."

I had surmised correctly, for there at the writing desk, with his suit of overalls lying beside him on a vacant chair, was Buford, busily engaged writing a letter, so intent that he did not observe me, when I noiselessly stepped behind his chair and glanced over his shoulder at his writing: "Dear A No. 1," the letter read, "Forgive me that I left you here, but I cannot go home, as I feel I am an ex-convict, and do not wish to add shame to the injury I already inflicted upon the proudest name in all Kentucky. I have decided not to see mother this time. I will tell you now—" He looked up and while tears followed each other down his face, he picked up the letter and crumpled it in his nervously twitching hand and stared silently at me.

"Buford," I addressed him, "are you not ashamed to attempt to spoil your good mother's best Christmas present? Have you not love enough left for her to know that she will not care if you were the most brutal murderer, instead of a runaway boy who had been placed behind the bars?"

He muttered something about hating to return home, but I did not give him a chance to make apologies. I put my arm through one of his arms and marched him down to the station, where I never permitted him out of my sight until I had him, safe from the "Wanderlust's" wiles, aboard of the train, pulling out of the same train shed which, only four months before we left as "roof of train" passengers. I felt so strange, riding "the plush" after so many long years, that when I heard below us the wheels, as they raced the miles, sing their "Song of the Rails," that I turned to Buford and said: "Buford, do you hear the wheels calling you: 'Come along! Come along! Come along!' " He smiled and nodded his head and I continued: "Buford,

will you not solemnly promise me, never again to heed their call to the road, never again to try to wreck your future in trying to become a miserable, homeless rover?" He did not answer, but, just then, as the engine whistled for our station, he pressed my hand.

When the train stopped, the first fellows we saw, when we stepped to the station platform, were the one-armed squire and the deputy sheriff, who had arrested us. They had their heads together, no doubt figuring out some new scheme to dig their greedy fingers into the taxpayer's treasury. We slipped past them and unobserved, went to the telephone exchange and I called up Braxton Manor.

Mr. Braxton, himself, answered the call, and when asked what was wanted, I answered: "Is this Mr. Braxton? This is Albert Jones, the chain-gang convict who found your bracelet." "Well, what do you want of us now?" came his impatient sounding voice across the wire. "I wish you would send your automobile down to the 'Bartlett Hotel' for us." "What? Do you think we have automobiles to send for you and especially on Christmas Eve?" came the now thoroughly annoyed voice over the telephone, and then added, "but who are the 'us' you speak about?" "The 'us' is your lost boy—Buford," I proudly answered. "For God's sake man, are you telling the truth?" came the now excitedly ringing voice from the other end of the line. "Wait a moment," I replied, and called Buford to the telephone. I could not hear a blessed word from the other end, but Buford sobbed so loud, he could not speak, he only repeated: "All right, all right," over and over again.

It was only a short wait until their automobile dashed in front of the hotel and Mr. and Mrs. Braxton alighted. A moment later the mother, who had so long and patiently waited for her runaway boy's return, promptly recognized her son, altho he had changed considerably by

I noiselessly stepped behind his chair and glanced over his shoulder at his writ ing.

growth and the rough out-of-door life, and with the exclamation: "Oh Buford! My boy!" to which he could only answer: "Oh Mother! Forgive me!" they were in each other's embrace, unable for sobs, which came from their hearts, to utter another word. Mr. Braxton stood aside, seemingly stricken helpless by the relief this unexpected return of his only child and beloved son had brought to him, but when he perceived the curious gazes of others, who were watching this affectionate greeting, he aroused himself and opening the door leading to the hotel's parlor, he gently guided the mother and son into it, while tears of inexpressible joy coursed down his face. Then he turned to me and while pressing my hands he stammered words of blessing for having returned to him, safe and sound, the boy, whom by this time he had given up all hopes to ever see again alive, and after he told me to wait until he returned, he too entered the parlor, closing and locking its door behind him.

It must have been almost an hour before they again emerged from the parlor, and when I saw all three looking as if heaven had come to them on earth, I felt fully repaid for bringing the lad back home. They climbed into their automobile and beckoned me to sit alongside the chauffeur and in record time we whizzed to the Manor.

It would take volumes to describe the joy of the darkies as they laid their eyes once more upon their "Marse Buford," who, tanned like a berry from the rough out-door life, had completely regained his usual health.

Christmas Eve—as it is the custom upon southern estates—an immense Christmas tree was lighted in the banquet hall of the manor and while the festivities were at their height I overheard old Aunt Dinah exclaim: "Lawd, ma good Missus shore looks ten yeahs youngah since Marse Bufo'd come back!" It was long after midnight when the

happy throng dispersed, the darkies to return to the humble log-cabins, while the white visitors were sent home in automobiles.

When everybody had left, Mr. Braxton called me into the library, where Mrs. Braxton and Buford were already awaiting us. "Mr. Jones," he happily said, when I entered, "step over to Buford's picture and take down the veil. It is no longer needed." Then I had to repeat word for word, how I trailed and brought Buford back to his now, oh, so happy parents.

After I had concluded my story, Mr. Braxton opened a drawer of the writing desk, took out and handed to me a circular on which in large letters was printed:

REWARD

$500.00

Will be paid for information that will lead to the return of

BUFORD BRAXTON

and an additional

$500.00

Will be paid for the apprehension of the scoundrel who enticed him away from his home, etc., etc., etc.

I read the circular, and not understanding why Mr. Braxton had handed it to me, I dryly inquired: "What about it?" Now came my turn to be astounded, for presently Mr. Braxton opened a small silverware safe, which was built into the library's wall and took out a money bag and placing it in front of me upon the table, while tears of joy dropped down his cheeks, he said: "I have had the full reward of a thousand dollars waiting all the long, dreary months in yonder safe, to hand it over to the person

who would bring back to his mother our wandering Buford. Money can never fully repay what you have done for our family. So take the reward, for you have certainly more than earned it and may God bless you and all other people as well, who return runaway boys to their homes."

Just then, before I had a chance to even say a single word, the colored butler entered the library with a lighted candle and opened the sliding doors leading into the same bed-chamber I had occupied on my previous visit at the manor, and while he showed me to my bed, the Braxtons filed out of the library.

After the butler had bowed himself out of the room, I thought that this time I had certainly earned a good night's rest and drew back the silken cover, but somehow my conscience would not permit me to do otherwise—I fell upon my knees alongside the bed and asked God to forgive me for not having been back to my own dear 'Home, sweet Home' for over a quarter of a century, and made my own dear old mother, who had been waiting for me in vain all these long, long years, more happy even, than I had made Mrs. Braxton.

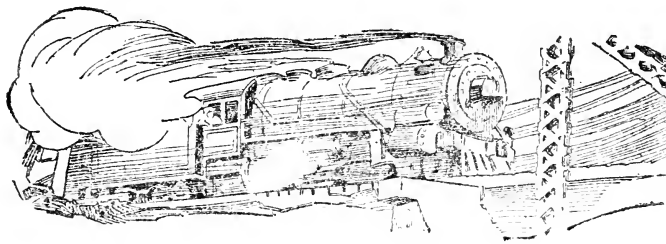
Not until New Year's Day, 1908, would Mr. and Mrs. Braxton permit me to bid them farewell.

I had almost reached the main entrance-gate, when Joe, the faithful butler, came running down the path and shouted: "Marse Jones, Missus Braxton wants yo'all to come back! She has not yet tole yo'all what she wants to tell yo' since yo'all brought Marse Bufo'd back to us." I returned to the manor and she said—undoubtedly Buford had, by this time told her about my monicker— "A No. 1, I want you to solemnly promise me that whenever you

travel through this section of Kentucky, you will come and visit us at our manor, as its door will always be open to welcome you."

This I promised to do and then I went. When I passed the convict-camp, on my way to town, I found the poor fellows celebrating the holiday on cornbread, greasy white meat and half-baked biscuits. I opened my money bag and distributed more than fifty dollars amongst them, so they could purchase some "extras" to their meagre bill of fare, which act caused them to dance with joy.

When I arrived at the station a southbound passenger train pulled just up to the platform and when it left I was hanging to the rods under the observation car, and the "Song of the Rails," the wheels sang, while they rolled me towards fair Florida, where a tramp in the winter time can travel in his summer clothes, sounded: "A No. 1, well done! A No. 1, well done! A No. 1, well done!"



CHAPTER XVIII.

"The Curse of Tramp Life."

IT was in the Spring of 1912, when returning north, via the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, coming from the sunny country bordering the Gulf of Mexico, where I had wintered that I remembered the promise I had made to Mrs. Braxton and stopping over at their railroad station, I walked out to the manor.

When I arrived at the manor it was night and everybody had already retired as the building was shrouded in complete darkness, but the hunting hounds' loud baying — I aroused their watchfulness as I opened the main entrance-gate — caused a lighted lamp to appear at the upper window and a voice called to know what was wanted. I shouted back my monicker and a few moments later I was told to enter at the front door — it had been opened — and find my own way to the bed-chamber adjoining the library, as all the house servants had long ago left the manor for their homes.

In the morning I opened the sliding-doors leading into the library, but just as I noted that Buford's picture was again veiled—this time with a black veil—and wondered what this meant, behind me through the other door entered Joe, the colored butler, carrying a tray with my breakfast, and before I had a chance to ask him why that black veil now covered the portrait, was gone.

Hardly had I finished my breakfast, when he again entered and leading me to the front door, I found Mrs. Braxton waiting in her automobile for me to accompany her in, what I thought would be a morning drive about the surrounding country.

"Buford is beyond this hill," is all she said, and then she pointed up the avenue of lofty elms.

My first question after I had quickly passed over the story of the four years since I was last their guest, was: "Where and how is Buford?" Mrs. Braxton did not seem to have heard my words on account of the noise made by passing over a newly graded piece of the road, and I repeated my question more loudly, adding: "Is Buford at home?" She understood this time, and with a, to me, strange sounding flection in her voice, she answered my query: "Yes, my darling Buford is at home, he will never leave his mother any more," and she continued after a pause: "Buford never tired telling us how much you did for him, our poor boy."

This was indeed strange to me—"our poor boy," she had said, I thought, perchance she had not yet recovered her full mental health from the anguish the runaway boy, during his disappearance had caused her.

Presently we stopped at the entrance of a well-kept cemetery. She motioned to me to climb out of the automobile, which I did, while she followed. Now she opened the cemetery gate and beckoned me to follow her. "Buford is beyond this hill," is all she said, and then she pointed up the avenue of lofty elms, while studded everywhere about the blue-grass lawn, were handsome monuments erected over the remains of departed dead.

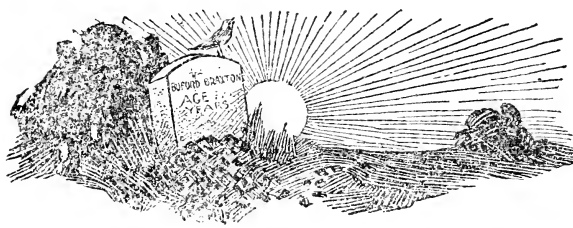
I understood her—Buford was beyond the hill visiting some friends, and she was taking me there to surprise him. She walked ahead and I mutely followed.

But what was this? She suddenly stopped and almost fainting she sank wearily upon a bench beside a grave that could only have been made recently, as yet no grass had sprung up between the many flowers planted into its moist soil. Now she steadied herself and while tears commenced to roll down her pallid cheeks, and while I noted all the more the many deep wrinkles which clearly

indicated the woeful sorrows she must have passed through, she tremblingly pointed at the freshly-made grave and sadly said: "Buford could not resist that monster, he has so often called in our presence the 'Wanderlust.' He could not stay contentedly with us in his good home. Ever so often he would almost rave, until he had another fling at the road, then he would return to be once more as good a son as God ever blessed parents with, until the next attack of this strange something drove him forth to become again a homeless tramp. Our pleadings were in vain! Once too often he went, as they brought him back to us in a pine box—killed under the cars by the 'Curse of Tramp Life'—the 'Wanderlust.' "

Then she could not utter another word, as anguished sobs, coming from the very bottom of her broken heart, choked her voice. Presently the poor, lonely mother, seemingly dragged to the earth by the weight of her indescribable woe, sank upon her knees beside the little mound—and I knelt too, and joined her in silent prayer.

THE END.



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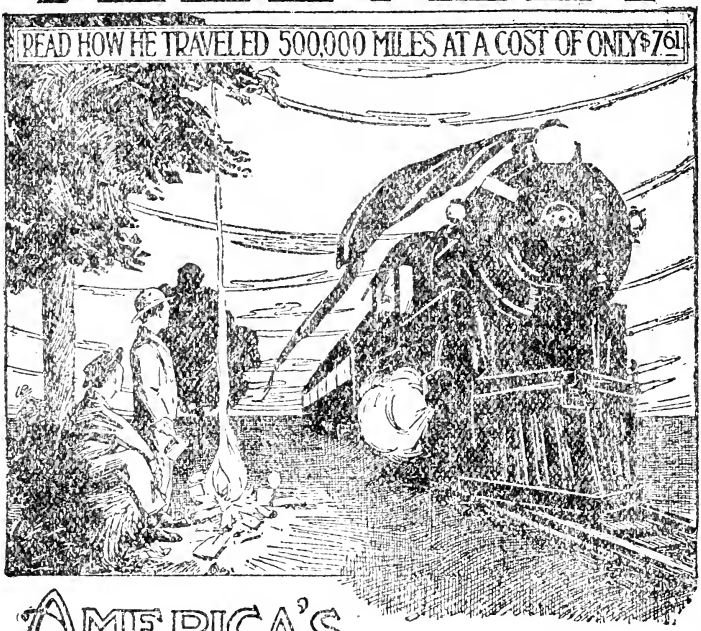

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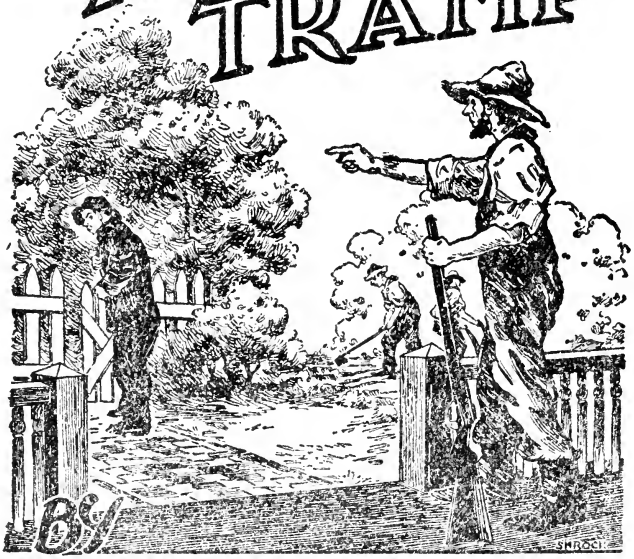

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